

**Rites of Birth and Initiation into womanhood among the Ewe-dome  
of Ghana: A Theological and Ethical Perspective.**

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**A Thesis presented to the University of Edinburgh for the Award of the  
Degree of Doctor of Philosophy.**

**December, 1998.**



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### **Declaration**

I hereby declare that this thesis has been composed by myself. That it has not been accepted in any previous application for a degree. That the work of which it is a record has been done by myself and that all verbatim extracts have been distinguished either by quotation marks or by single-spaced indentations and the sources of information have been duly acknowledged.

Rebecca Yawa Ganusah

## **Acknowledgement**

My deepest thanks go to the “African Theological Initiative” and the Pew Charitable Trust for initiating and funding respectively, this project. The work could not have come about without their funding and other forms of support.

My sincere thanks also go to my supervisor, Dr. Andrew Ross, for the able manner in which the work was supervised. His readiness and patience to read through the work and to make comments and suggestions have helped in shaping the thesis to its present level.

I am very grateful to Rev. Joshua Kudadjie, one of my former Heads of Department, Department for The Study of Religions, University of Ghana. He is a mentor and one who encouraged me to stay in academia. To him and to other colleagues and supporting staff in that Department, I say a big Thank You.

To all members of staff of the Centre For The Study of Christianity in The Non-Western World, I say a big Thank You. They include Prof. David Kerr, Prof. Andrew Walls, Dr. Jack Thompson, Dr. James Cox, Dr. Marcella Althaus-Reid, the post-graduate secretary (Mrs Anne Fernon), the librarians - Miss Margaret Acton, Mrs. Doreen Walls and Mrs. Elizabeth Leitch (of “African Christianity Project”). They are all pleasant people to work with. The same thanks go to Prof. L. W. Hurtado, Head of Department of New Testament studies, who, even at short notices, made me feel welcomed for discussions on some scriptural passages.

To the computing staff in the Faculty of Divinity and in the main Library do I owe many thanks. I was very “raw” at computing when I came over to the Centre. Through their classes and other forms of support, I now feel so much joy within me to be able to type my own thesis. The same thanks go to all colleagues in the computer Laboratories, whose company I very much enjoyed. Indeed, to all in the Faculty of Divinity do I owe much gratitude for support in various ways.

My deep gratitude goes to my sister Judith and the husband Desmond Mensah who did everything possible to see me through the fieldwork. They literally carried the burden of my transportation on their shoulders by putting at my disposal, a vehicle that I used to and from the villages and towns throughout my fieldwork. It

would have been impossible for me to go to some parts of the field at the right time, without the vehicle. Other forms of assistance that I had from the couple and other members of my family cannot be expressed here on paper. To Kofi, alias “Yellow man”, my driver and photographer at certain points, I say a big Thank You.

To my field assistants who literally led me into the homes of some of those interviewed, I say Thank You. Mr. Opoku-Abima of Aveme-Beme and Yanene of Nyangbo are quite elderly, but the enthusiasm with which they helped in arranging for my interviews is quite amazing. To Alex and Esther Abada of Kpandu I also owe many thanks for the same kind of help.

Many are those who were my respondents, names that cannot be listed individually here. The full list of respondents would be found under “Bibliography”. To all of them I say a big Thank You.

My children, Sherry Eleblu and Frank Eleblu also deserve special thanks. They have been a source of joy and determination in my life; very concerned with everything that I do. I can never forget also their father, my late husband, Mr. Samuel Eleblu, whose shocking death shook my very being. May his soul and that of my late mother, Flora Attah, rest peacefully in the arms of their maker. *Nye manlɔ wo be akpɔ gbede o* ( I shall never forget them).

I remain responsible for any lapses in this thesis.

## Some Ewe symbols

▷ to be pronounced as *or* as in “for”

η ‘ ‘ *nɣl* ‘ “England”

ε ‘ ‘ as in *let*

## Abstract

The thesis is based on research that was carried out among some groups of people in Ewe-dome of Ghana. Ewe-dome is a sub-group of a larger ethnic group, the Ewe.

The Ewe-dome, like many other African people, believe that the world is made up not only of the physical things that we perceive but also, it has a spiritual dimension to it. Human persons in particular, are perceived as comprising flesh (*ηutila*) as well as *gbɔgbɔ* (spiritual breath of life), received from *Mawu* (the ultimate creator God of the universe.) The physio-spiritual life of a person is also perceived as going through various stages of existence. There is the stage of birth, the stage of puberty, marriage stage, the stage of death, and the stage of ancestorhood. These stages are found to be crucial in a person's life and are, therefore, marked by various rites. The rites that are performed at the various stages are transpersonal, in other words, members of the community need to know about the various stages that a person has entered and participate in the activities that are associated with them.

Although the Evangelical Presbyterian Church, Ghana, the dominant Church in the area, has permitted Christian women to undergo the rite of initiation into womanhood, some Christian young women, in these days (around the 1990s) are refusing to perform the rite. To such Christians, the rite is unchristian. It is also clear that some Christians are unwilling to perform some aspects of the birth rite which to them are considered unchristian.

The non-performance of the rites by some members of the community is creating various difficulties of conscience for some individuals as well as for whole groups of people in Ewe-dome society. What is unchristian about the rites? is the question that some have been asking. For some Christians and traditional religious believers, the refusal to perform the rite of initiation into womanhood is simply a deliberate show of disrespect for a cultural institution that has been found to be essential to the social health of Ewe-dome society.

We attempt to study in this thesis, what exactly are the rites of birth and initiation into womanhood (among the Ewe-dome of Ghana). We want to find out

among other things, the basis for the performance of the rites; the impact of the Christian faith and other forms of modernity on the traditional rites; whether the rites have any positive values and whether they are relevant in contemporary Ewe-dome society; and how far the individual in Ewe-dome can claim to have rights of his or her own in the traditional understanding of society. In the final analysis, we shall assess how far a resolution is possible, where there is a clash between the traditional practices and the Christian faith as well as what form a resolution might take where there is a clash of the traditional practices with the moral and ethical issues that are raised by internationally recognized conventions like the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.



## Chapter 1

### INTRODUCTION

#### *1.1. Statement of Problem*

The African is said to be one who celebrates life. He or she sees his or her whole life as a physio-spiritual bundle of existence that is marked by various stages. There is the stage of birth, the stage of puberty, marriage stage and lastly (but not in finality) the stage of death. These various stages are seen as crucial in a person's life and are, therefore, marked in rites. Thus we have rites of birth, rites around puberty stage, marriage rites, death and ancestral rites. These, in many societies, are expected to be performed by each individual and in formalized ways, witnessed by the whole group.

I have observed among the Ewe-dome of Ghana, around the latter part of the 1980s, that some Christian adolescent girls would prefer not to perform the rite of initiation into womanhood, referred to by some as puberty rite, a rite that is instituted among other things, to mark transition from childhood to adulthood. Some Christians would also not perform some aspects of the birth rite. To such Christians, these rites or certain elements in them are unchristian.

I have observed also that the non-performance of the rites by some members of the community is creating various difficulties of conscience for some individuals as well as for whole groups of people in the Ewe-dome society. In the eyes of some parents and others in the society, the refusal to perform the rite of initiation into womanhood is simply a rejection of the traditional norms. Some also do not seem to be clear about what is unchristian about the rites. "What is unchristian about the rites?" is the question that some have been asking.

Furthermore, there has been a growing concern among Ghanaians in the past few years (of the 1990s) over a social menace that has been plaguing society, namely, teenage pregnancy. The cause of this menace, it is asserted by some, can be traced to

the Church<sup>1</sup> in Ghana, for, the Church, it is said, does not allow the girls to go through the proper rite. The proper rite in this case, is the rite of initiation into womanhood; a rite that among other things, is meant to ensure girls remain chaste until they are married.

The above concerns have been working on my mind for some time now and in a paper on “Teenage Pregnancy, Puberty Rites and the Church in Ghana”<sup>2</sup>, I outlined what I felt to be the root causes of teenage pregnancy in the Ghanaian society. These causes, I contended, include lack of parental concern, peer pressure, pornography, poverty and lack of proper education of the youth on sexual morality. But I realized the issue about “puberty rites” needed an in-depth study more than could be handled at the time. There were several gaps in my knowledge about the situation at the time, that needed to be filled.

Seeing myself as one interested in my African traditional heritage as well as being a Christian and teacher in contemporary moral and ethical issues, I have decided to go deeper into this whole issue of examining the traditional rites of birth and initiation into womanhood, among the Ewe-dome of Ghana. I would like to find out the religious or philosophical basis for the performance of the rites, and to find out also what exactly is held to be unchristian in the chosen rites.

The issue, I felt, may not be one only of an apparent conflict between an African traditional practice and the Christian faith; it may involve also, moral issues. Are the rites of any positive values to the people at this stage in time? In other words, how far are they relevant in contemporary Ewe-dome society? Could an individual opt out of the rites if one has found them to be against one’s religious or other convictions? Put in other words, has the individual any rights or choice in the traditional Ewe-dome understanding of society? These are but some of the moral questions over which we intend to have also some ethical reflection.

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<sup>1</sup> By the Church, I am referring to the various Christian groups in the country.

<sup>2</sup> Ganusah Rebecca Yawa, “Teenage Pregnancy, Puberty Rites And The Church In Ghana”, in *Trinity Journal of Church and Theology*, Volume V, July, 1995, Numbers 1&2.

## 1.2. Aims and Objectives

My aims and objectives, therefore, are :

1. To find out what exactly the birth and initiation into womanhood rites are (in this case among the Ewe-dome of Ghana).
2. To find out the philosophical or religious basis for the performance of the rites.
3. To assess the impact of the Christian faith and various forms of modernity on the traditional rites and that of the rites on the people.
4. To find out how far a resolution is possible, where there is a clash between the traditional practices and the Christian faith and between the differing Christian attitudes to the rites.
5. To find out how far a resolution is possible where there is a clash between the traditional practices and the moral and ethical issues that may be raised.

## 1.3. Brief Literature Review

I do not pretend to be the first to write on rites that are performed to mark various stages in a person's life. Indeed, it is through the writings of Arnold van Gennep, that we have become accustomed to talking of such rites as rites of passage. It should be noted, however, that according to van Gennep, the rites of passage include not only those of the stages we have mentioned (that is: birth, puberty, marriage and death), but also, "Transitions from group to group and from one social situation to the next are looked on as implicit in the very fact of existence"<sup>3</sup>. Under rites of passage, therefore, consideration is also given to "such acts like enthronement, initiation into priesthood and occupational specialisation"<sup>4</sup>. Van Gennep includes also in what he considers to be rites of passage, ceremonies that accompany seasonal changes, for example, of rainy season, planting, harvesting, and so on. These are referred to by Cox, for example, as "calendrical rituals"<sup>5</sup>, as they occur at various times in the year. So that Christian rituals to re-enact the death and

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<sup>3</sup> Van Gennep Arnold, *The Rites of Passage* (Translated by Monika B. Zizedom and Gabrielle L. Coffee, with introduction by Solon T. Kimball), London, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1960, p 3

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Cox James, *Expressing the Sacred: An Introduction to the Phenomenology of Religion*, Harare, University of Zimbabwe Publications, 1992, p 80

resurrection of Jesus Christ at Easter, among others; the yearly pilgrimage of Muslims to Mecca to perform rituals of the Hajj; and Jewish rituals associated with the Passover feast, for example, can all be classified under this group of calendrical rituals<sup>6</sup>.

Victor Turner refers to the various cycles or passages in a person's life as "life-crisis". A "life-crisis", Turner writes, "is an important point in the physical or social development of an individual, such as birth, puberty, or death"<sup>7</sup>. And in many societies, he notes, ceremonies or rituals are designed to mark the transition from one of such phases of life or social status to another.

We have christening and graduation ceremonies, for example, the first to indicate the arrival of a new social personality on the human scene, the second to celebrate the successful outcome of a long and often painful learning process and the launching of a new bread winner.<sup>8</sup>

These "crisis ceremonies", Turner further explains,

not only concern the individuals on whom they are centred, but also mark changes in the relationships of all the people connected with them by ties of blood, marriage, cash, political control, and in many other ways<sup>9</sup>.

Discussing rites and rituals, we shall also mention what are usually referred to as "rituals of affliction"<sup>10</sup>. These, some scholars also call "crisis rituals"<sup>11</sup>. To avoid a confusion between Turner's description of rites of passage as rituals of life-crisis and this other category of rituals ("crisis rituals") we shall stick to the term "rituals of affliction", rather than calling them "crisis rituals". Rituals of affliction are performed at points of disequilibrium or of suffering either in an individual's life, or in that of a whole community. They are performed, for example, for a barren woman to be able to have children, or for a person who may be going through certain forms of suffering, sometimes as a result of a call from a spirit power. They are performed also at points of communal suffering through, for example, drought, famine or

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Turner Victor, *The Forest of Symbols - Aspects of Ndembu Ritual*, Ithaca, New York, Cornell University Press, 1967, p 7.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., p 9

<sup>11</sup> Cox James, *Expressing the Sacred*, p 80.

illness. Such rituals are usually performed after divination to find out the cause of the affliction. The affliction, it is believed, could be a symptom of divine displeasure. Rituals prescribed by the diviner or specialist are then performed to rectify the situation.

In discussing one of the rites in the life stages of a person, one with which we are concerned in this work, van Gennep advises that “it would be better to stop calling initiation rites ‘puberty rites’”<sup>12</sup>. This is because, van Gennep has noted, physiological changes in persons that are usually used as signs for puberty, vary from person to person or from race to race. The physical puberty of girls, for example, Gennep has observed, is usually “marked by a swelling of the breasts, an enlargement of the pelvis, the appearance of pubic hair, and above all the first menstrual flow. Therefore it would seem simple to date the transition from childhood to adolescence from the first appearance of these signs”; puberty being “important only for the ability to conceive”<sup>13</sup>. For van Gennep, and from what he calls a social point, “This is not the case, for reasons that are primarily physiological”<sup>14</sup>. There are variations in the age at which circumcision, for example, is practised in various cultures. Among many peoples, van Gennep has noted, “the operation is performed at fairly great intervals - for instance, every two, three, four, or five years - so that children of different degrees of sexual development are circumcised at the same time”.<sup>15</sup> This is because, van Gennep further explains, sexual developments vary from individual to individual, from place to place or from race to race. These depend also on factors such as diet, heredity, climate and occupation. Sexual enjoyment, for example, van Gennep has noted, is not dependent on the physical visible signs of puberty, but may be experienced earlier or later, depending on the individual.<sup>16</sup> Since it would be an almost hair-splitting exercise trying to know when exactly one has come to physical puberty, various societies have, therefore, been performing the rite of initiation at intervals as mentioned above, to cater for the various degrees of sexual development. Thus, in some areas or in some cases, “social puberty” (the point at which some find

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<sup>12</sup> Van Gennep Arnold, *The Rites of Passage*, p 66

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., p 69

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

it fitting to perform the initiation rite for young adults) may precede an actual “physiological puberty” (the point at which the adolescent actually begins to have experiences of adolescence). In other areas or cases, the physiological puberty may precede the social puberty. So that, even though van Gennep concedes the fact that in some rare instances physiological puberty may coincide with the social puberty, it is not good enough to use the expression “puberty rites” as a designation of all the rites, ceremonies and practices which, among different peoples, mark the transition from childhood to adolescence.<sup>17</sup>

I have found van Gennep’s arguments to be valid to a large extent; and in particular, when one relates them to the contemporary Ewe-dome situation. The rite to initiate young women into adulthood in contemporary Ewe-dome society, cannot just be called a puberty rite. This is because the rite, in contemporary Ewe-dome society, is performed for a woman, irrespective of age or status. Sometimes, women, even with children, would have to perform the rite. This is because, to some extent, a woman who has not performed the rite, irrespective of her age, is not given a “full” recognition as a woman in the society. One would, therefore, have to perform the rite to qualify as a full woman of the society. Factors for the delay of the performance of the rite are, however, not only those of van Gennep’s analysis. The rite in Ewe-dome involves a lot of expenditure. It is supposed to be performed for the young women by their parents, the mother in particular. In these days, however, the parents are not able to provide for the items that are involved. Girls/women, therefore, have to work to help the parents in the provision of the items. This can take several years in some cases. Some, for obvious reasons, for example, of not being able to wait for the rite, find themselves in marital homes even before the performance of the rite. But the rite must still be performed for various reasons that we shall discuss in the later chapters. So that in Ewe-dome, it is not even a case of trying to cater for degrees of sexual development, it is a matter more of waiting till one is able to find the resources that are needed for the rite. Physiological changes in girls certainly did qualify the Ewe-dome girls to perform the rite in the past, but in contemporary life, it is more of an economic factor than that of sexual development.

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid., pp 66 - 68



Clearly, I am also not the first person to write on rites of passage in Ghanaian or other African societies. Some scholars have described some of the rites that are performed among some tribes. Kofi Asare Opoku, for example, has described the rite of *Dipo* that is performed for girls in the Krobo area of Ghana, to initiate them into adulthood.<sup>18</sup> Furthermore, Sarpong, in his *Girls' Nubility Rites in Ashanti*, has also written about various processes of initiation that Ashanti girls of Ghana go through, to mark their "maidenly debut into womanhood"<sup>19</sup>.

Going outside Ghana, Mbiti, for example, writing about some East African peoples, says that the initiates "learn to endure hardships, they learn to live with one another, they learn to obey, they learn the secrets and mysteries of the man-woman relationships".<sup>20</sup> The rites Mbiti is talking about include physical operations of circumcision of boys, and excision of the clitoris for girls, among other rituals.

Valuable as the existing works are, they have, to a large extent, left the concerns of my thesis untouched.

Going further into the other areas of my concern in the thesis, I would state also say that I do not pretend to be the first to voice a concern on the encounter between the Christian faith and African beliefs and practices. Indeed, many in this second half of the 20th century (and even before), have come out with observations that the African convert to the Christian faith is not able to live an authentic life as a Christian nor as an African. Christianity in Africa seems to have denied too many things African and, therefore, made the African to live an uncomfortable African Christian life. An oft-quoted observation, made by Busia several years ago, which I still find relevant to the current situation in Africa is that:

As one watches the daily lives and activities of the people, and takes account of the rites connected with marriage, birth, death, widowhood, harvests, or installations to traditional offices, one learns that a great deal of the normal communal activities of the converts lie outside their Christian activities, and that for all their influence, the Christian Churches are still alien institutions, intruding upon, but not integrated with indigenous social institutions.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Opoku Kofi Asare, *West African Traditional Religion*, Jurong, FEP International Private Ltd., 1978.

<sup>19</sup> Sarpong Peter, *Girls' Nubility Rites in Ashanti*, Tema, Ghana Publishing Corporation, 1977, p 13

<sup>20</sup> Mbiti John S., *African Religions and Philosophy*, London, Heinemann, 1975, p 122

<sup>21</sup> Busia K. A., *Report on a Social Survey of Sekondi-Takoradi*, Crown Agents, 1950, p 111

The Christian converts, by this observation, are seen as cut off from almost all the major activities of their life. In other words, the Christian faith does not seem to integrate the communal way of life of the people into its practices. And since the African converts are not able to give up these ways of life, they have found themselves to be a bit confused as to what they should do as Christians and at the same time live authentic lives as Africans. Many reasons have been given for the above situation. For example, the missionaries were said to have given little or no recognition to the culture or the roots of the people among whom they worked. They seemed to be interested only in the people, not their culture; as if to take the people out of the world rather than make them disciples in the world. In Africa, the missionaries were said to have adopted the practice of *tabula rasa* - "the doctrine that there was nothing in the non-Christian culture upon which the Christian missionary could build and consequently, every aspect of the traditional non-Christian culture must be destroyed before Christianity can be built up".<sup>22</sup> Such observations and many more, to a large extent, have led to the development of what is now known as African theology or African Christian theology<sup>23</sup>. It is the attempt to find out how best the Christian faith could be related to African culture to make the Christian life more meaningful to the African Christian. There is the feeling that the Christian Gospel ought not to cut off the African from his or her roots but could be inculturated in a way that could make the African live an authentic life as an African. Kwesi Dickson, for example, has expressed the concern that the message of God "must be heard and appropriated in the context of every people's circumstances; the Scriptures must be heard speaking to people in the particularity of their life situations"<sup>24</sup>. Many terminologies such as indigenization, contextualization, accommodation, incarnation, inculturation, adaptation and the like are used to describe the enterprise of African Christian theology. Technically, they all have their precise meanings, but basically they all have the same concern. Shorter defines "inculturation", for example, as "the

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<sup>22</sup> Pobee John, *Skenosis: Christian Faith in an African context*, Gweru, Mambo Press, 1992, p 10

<sup>23</sup> I prefer the use of the term "African Christian Theology" to that of "African Theology". The term "African Theology", to me, seems to be vague since it could also refer to theology or theologies about African Traditional Religions. "African Christian Theology" seems to be more specific in describing the enterprise, of how best to relate the Gospel meaningfully to the African situation.

<sup>24</sup> Dickson Kwesi, *Theology in Africa*, Darton, Maryknoll, New York, Longman and Todd, and Orbis Books, 1984, p 20



on-going dialogue between faith and culture or cultures. More fully, it is the creative and dynamic relationship between the Christian message and a culture or cultures".<sup>25</sup> Elsewhere, he puts it that "the ultimate criterion of inculturation is interculturalization, or transculturalization"<sup>26</sup>. So that missionary activity ought to be a dialogical process between the missionary's culture and that of the one being evangelized. The process is to be of a genuine dialogue between both sides.

Shorter is right in talking of an "on-going dialogue" since the enterprise of applying the Christian faith to various cultures is not a once-and-for-all event. Culture is dynamic and trying to relate the Gospel to it may also, therefore, be a dynamic process.

Bruce Nicholls defines "contextualization" as "the translation of the unchanging content of the Gospel of the Kingdom into verbal form meaningful to the peoples in their separate cultures and within their particular existential situation".<sup>27</sup> Nicholls (and those who may follow in this vein) is of the view that the Christian message ought to be interpreted or translated in various cultures in such a way that it will be meaningfully applied in the life situations of these various cultures. The terminologies, as stated earlier, have their technical meanings and emphases, even though they all have basically the same concern. This writer will not invent a new word, but will use the terms interchangeably, depending on the line of thought. One thinks that the words of Bolaji Idowu aptly sum the aim of the enterprises in the African context when he puts it that:

We seek...to discover in what way the Christian faith could best be presented, interpreted, and inculcated in Africa so that Africans will hear God in Jesus Christ addressing Himself immediately to them in their own native situation and particular circumstances.<sup>28</sup>

Very good sounding as the contentions are, we need to add here, however, that relating the Christian message to culture could be a difficult enterprise; and the problems that have come out of it have not been peculiar to Africa. They have also

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<sup>25</sup> Shorter A., *Toward a Theology of Inculturation*, Maryknoll, New York, Orbis Books, 1988, p 11

<sup>26</sup> Shorter A., *Evangelization and Culture*, Geoffrey Chapman, 1994, p 33

<sup>27</sup> Nicholls Bruce, "Theological Education and Evangelization" in Douglas J. D., (ed.), *Let the Earth Hear His Voice*, Minneapolis, World Wide, 1975, p 647

<sup>28</sup> Dickson K. & Ellingworth P., (eds.), *Biblical Revelation and African Beliefs*, London, Lutterworth Press, 1969, p 16

not been voiced by Africans alone. The problem of contextualization, or inculturation, or of the other terminologies, started as far back as the New Testament apostolic days, when the apostles of Christ had to face, for example, the problem of whether the Gentiles ought to be circumcised or take on some Jewish practices before they became Christians (Acts 15). One can even go beyond that to say that, the very coming of Jesus Christ, from the spirit world of perfection, to dwell in the human plane of imperfection and to try to make people live by the spirit of perfection, marks the beginning of inculturation (or of the other terminologies). Many of the problems that Christ faced are also those that his disciples had to face. Going back to Acts 15, we may say that the decision of the Jerusalem Council seems to save the situation when it declares that:

For it has seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us to lay upon you no greater burden than these necessary things: that you abstain from what has been sacrificed to idols and from blood and from what is strangled and unchastity.<sup>29</sup>

The standards as set by the Council are, obviously, not necessarily the only ones that would qualify a person to enter into the Kingdom of God, for, there is more to what it means to be in the Christian Kingdom of God. The point of importance here, however, is that the message of Christ ought to be seen as supracultural. Non-Jews, therefore, need not become Jews through circumcision, for example, before they become Christians. The implications of that decision went far in making the Gentile converts feel more at home with the faith even if not in its perfection.

Similar problems occurred during the Graeco-Roman days of the Christian faith when Christians were seen as non-conformists to the accepted customs - mostly associated with the state religion - and for which there was a lot of persecution of the Christians. Adaptations had to be made to the Greek culture and it has been observed, for example, that:

Christians received a tremendous bonus from the Greek religious tradition, a bonus they were successful in turning to their own good. This was the case with the *logos* concept. The *logos* stood for the divine reason, [expressed as

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<sup>29</sup> All Biblical quotations, unless otherwise stated, are from Lindsell Harold, (ed.), *The Study Bible: Revised Standard Version*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1971

such by the Greeks (sic)] the controlling principle of the universe and which was manifested in speech. As such it retained a strong religious element.<sup>30</sup>

The view is that the Christian apologists at the time made use of the Greek philosophical concept of the *logos*, as they developed the Logos doctrine, in order to explain satisfactorily, the divine incarnation of God. Justin Martyr, for example, an early Church Father and great early apologist, writes that “For next to God, we worship and love the Word who is from the unbegotten and ineffable God.....For the seed and invitation imparted according to capacity is one thing, and quite another is the thing itself of which there is the participation and invitation according to the grace which is from Him”.<sup>31</sup> Jesus, the Word, serves as the source of interaction or participation between God (or the world of perfection of Platonic forms, for example) and the images of this material world.

Talking of accommodation, again, one can cite another classical example at the time of the Jesuits’ missionary work in China and Japan in the 16th and 17th centuries. There was a problem of how to relate the complex rites associated with the dead in China to the Christian faith. Matteo Ricci, and later, in the words of the Sacred Congregation for Propagation of the Faith (Propaganda Fidei) had asked that no attempt be made “in any way to persuade these people to change their customs, their habits and their behaviour, as long as they are not evidently contrary to religion and morality...”<sup>32</sup> The tussle that developed later, however, between the Holy Office in Rome and the missionaries, over accommodating some aspects of the ancestral rites that were seen as filial duties only, shows how complex the situation could be, trying to apply the Gospel to cultures.

African theologians, we have noted, and indeed, some non-Africans have not given up this kind of theological reflection. As far back as 1945, a Catholic missionary to Congo, Rev. Placide Tempels, in his study of what he called the Bantu philosophy of life, pointed out that there had not been a systematic study of the

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<sup>30</sup> Lamin Sanneh, *Translating The Message*, Maryknoll, New York, Orbis Books, 1995, p 61

<sup>31</sup> Justin Martyr, 2 Apology 13, in Hasselgrave David J. & Rommen Edward, (eds.), *Contextualization: Meanings, Methods and Models*, Apollos-Inter-Varsity Press, 1990, pp 18 - 19

<sup>32</sup> Rule P. K., *Kung-tsu or Confucius: The Jesuit Interpretation of Confucianism*, Sydney, Allen & Unwin, 1986, Vol. 2 p 126, in Ross Andrew, *A Vision Betrayed: The Jesuits in Japan and China (1542 - 1742)*, Edinburgh University Press, 1994, p 185

ontology of the Bantu which to him, is logical and consistent with the Bantu way of life. Tempels, therefore, contends that: "We have one heavy responsibility of examining, assessing and judging his philosophy and of not failing to discover that kernel of truth".<sup>33</sup> Tempels is admonishing his fellow missionaries to study carefully, the way of life of the "Bantu" (hence the African) and to find out whether there was "no kernel of truth" that could help in communicating better with the people. Whether Tempels' later findings about "a vital-force" that is said to pervade the "Bantu" way of life, could be accepted as authentic for the "Bantu" or not, is an issue not of our contention in this thesis. One may say that Tempels, among others, has at least, raised more the consciousness of people of learning about the traditional life/culture of the "Bantu", and hence the African. John Taylor, another non-African, questions that: "If he (Christ) came into the world of African cosmology to redeem man as Africans understand him, would he be recognized to the rest of the Church Universal?"<sup>34</sup> Taylor must have felt that it is time the Church re-examined the missionary attitude towards the Christian faith and African culture.

Taking from the calls of African and non-African theologians that something ought to be done to make the Christian life more meaningful to the African, and having our other concerns in mind, we are, in this thesis, examining how best the chosen rites of passage in Ewe-dome, that is, the rites of birth and initiation into womanhood, may be integrated into Christian beliefs and practices.

Before we can do that, however, we need to examine carefully, some aspects of Ewe-dome philosophy about life. In this case, we need to find out reasons for the people's behaviour - in relation to the chosen rites. We need to examine the world view of the people; the reasons for the performance of the rites, and the correlation that exists between beliefs, rites and lifestyle.

Talking about Ewe-dome philosophy of life, and "African philosophy" for that matter, one is aware of certain views that are expressed by both African and non-African philosophers, as to whether there is an "African philosophy". As Gyekye, for example, has noted, "Scholars, including philosophers, tend to squirm a little at the

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<sup>33</sup> Tempels P., *Bantu Philosophy*, Presence Africaine, 1959, p 113

<sup>34</sup> Taylor J. V., *The Primal Vision: Christian Presence and African Religion*, London, SCM, 1963, P 16

mention of African philosophy” since philosophy seems to be “assumed to be a special relish of the peoples of the West and East”.<sup>35</sup>

It would appear such a position is held because, until recently, African views held about the world or existence, and reflections about them (if any), had not been organized in written, systematic or logical presentations as we have in various philosophical writings of the East and the West. Or, Africans seem to be living their life on the basis of the given - particularly, relating it to the traditions of their fathers - without seemingly reflecting about it. In other words, Africans seem to make little effort to reflect on various issues of their various societies. These include the cultural, economic, political, moral/ethical and historical life and experiences of the people. And even where there is a reflection Africans seem to refuse to adjust in order to meet the demands of modernity, scientific and technological advancement. There is some element of truth in such observations. For example, some Africans seem to be so tied down with some traditional practices to the extent that they would regard any philosophical reflection about them as a betrayal; and rude rejection of the traditions and accepted norms. As such, doing “African philosophy” could sometimes be a difficult, if not daring exercise. Some (even “modern” African philosophers), also, instead of philosophizing about African problems relating to, for instance religious beliefs, values, politics, ethnicity, economics, would rather do “western philosophy” - discussing further, and communicating on western ideas and thoughts while neglecting issues in the African context. Africans need to know about the philosophies of others, and where these are helpful, make use of them as means to ends, not only as ends in themselves. But it is essential that they also engage in the analysis and critical reflection of the life experiences and thoughts of their own people.

In spite of any scepticism, one would still say that there is certainly, philosophy in African culture - even if this is not expressed in logical categories of the West or the East. As a matter of fact, people in every culture, no matter how “primitive” or “crude” their beliefs or ways of life may seem, do reflect about life.

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<sup>35</sup> Gyekye Kwame, *An Essay on African Philosophical Thought: The Akan conceptual scheme*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1987, p 3

And that is an essence of philosophy. This is to agree with the view of Tempels when he insists that: to declare on *a priori* grounds that some people do not have ideas “on the nature of beings; that they have no ontology and that they are completely lacking in logic, is simply to turn one’s back on reality”.<sup>36</sup> Gyekye also insists that some aspects of the philosophy can be found in proverbs, linguistic expressions, myths and folktales, religious beliefs and rituals, art symbols and the socio-political institutions<sup>37</sup>. Many proverbs in Ewe-dome, for example, express profound philosophical insights into the nature of human existence and the meaning of life. The Ewe-dome have a proverb, for example, that states that “*Nunya adidoe asi metune o*”. This literally means: “Wisdom is like a baobab tree, no one hand can encircle it”. The deeper meaning is that one should have a sense of humility and not be arrogant or boastful, for one person cannot claim to have absolute knowledge about anything/everything.

In discussing the moral and ethical issues of the rites of birth and initiation into womanhood in Ewe-dome, we are conscious also, of observations made by some African ethicists that norms that have been established in Africa, become authoritative. And that for the authoritative nature of the norms, some talk of an ethics of commands in Africa - one has to act because tradition says so. In his investigations into “Aspects of African Ethics”, Kudadjie, for example, has observed that:

Not infrequently, some acts are jealously carried out while others are carefully avoided for no other reason or purpose than that the one is customary and the other not....The custom is obeyed because it has authority: Obedience to authority without question is a moral ideal in Africa.<sup>38</sup>

Kudadjie, however, added that:

The deontological nature of aspects of African Traditional Ethics does not mean that there is no place for a teleological system in African ethics. In point of fact, African ethics is quite teleological - an ethic of purposes and ends.... for in real life there are times when one must know for what reasons and benefits one must behave in a particular way rather than others.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Tempels Placide, *Bantu Philosophy*, p 16

<sup>37</sup> Gyekye Kwame, *An Essay on African Philosophical Thought*, p ix

<sup>38</sup> Kudadjie J. N., “Aspects of African Ethics” in Pobee J. S., (ed.), *Religion, Morality and Population Dynamics*, Accra, University of Ghana, 1977, p 22

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.



Kudadjie has seen that customary behaviour in Africa, even though it may be said to be dependent on what tradition says, is also based on reflective thinking of the people. However, one would still raise the question as to whether having asked “for what reasons and benefits one must behave in a particular way rather than the others”, one is then free, in Ewe-dome society, to act in a way one likes if one did not find the reasons or benefits to be good enough to one. In other words, the thesis would go beyond the situation of the Ewe-dome having knowledge of the reasons and benefits for the performance of the rites, to raise further questions of whether an individual could then opt out of the rites if one had found them to be against one’s religious or other convictions. Has the individual a choice in Ewe-dome society?

#### *1.4. Methodology*

I relied mainly on personal observation and interviews held with people of various backgrounds in the society. In all I worked with sixty-five people. Let me state that the choice of people did not depend on strict statistical computation. It depended more on who the people are in the community. It depended on age, status, religious affiliation and sex. Those chosen include queenmothers and chiefs - who exercise political authority in the towns/villages. The queenmothers are also some of the custodians of tradition, in-charge especially of matters which affect females in the society. Some of the very elderly were chosen because they know better the basis for the rites and are also, in some cases, the custodians of tradition. Others include Church leaders as well as the laity, traditional religious believers, those who had performed the rite of initiation into womanhood and those who are old in age but who, for various reasons, have not yet performed it. I had to interview more than, say, five people on an issue that seemed to be controversial, in order to have consistency in what could be accepted as evidence. But I also presented divergent views, in some cases, verbatim. I also had a group discussion with some women in the Church from one of the traditional areas, that is, Aveme traditional area. Some of these women also, after the group discussion, were interviewed on individual basis for them to feel free to express views that could not be expressed in a group discussion.

I did not use a structured questionnaire but I had some questions that served as a guide in bringing up issues of my concern. It was more convenient that way since many of the elderly are illiterates and could not, therefore, have filled in questionnaires. It should be noted, however, that other questions were also asked in the course of the interviews, that are not found in the questions' guide. Such questions arose at various points of the interviews as the researcher wanted to know more about certain issues that were raised. The issue about the concept of "*Mawu-Lisa*", (a dual-deity), for example, discussed at pages 27 - 30, was not included in my questions' guide; but it arose in the discussions I had with one of my respondents.<sup>40</sup> Other useful information was also received, that was not necessarily out of the questions' guide. Sometimes also I simply asked questions during on-going processes to which I had useful answers. I have found the interviewing method quite suitable, even though tedious. Delicate and pertinent questions could be asked and answered in the informal atmosphere which I tried always to maintain. Saying this does not mean there were no problems with the method of trying to have a personal involvement. It could take a lot of courage for one to appear in the home of a chief, for example, and start interviewing him - even if one had already booked an appointment with him. Another problem that I faced was that the rite of initiation into womanhood is usually performed in contemporary Ewe-dome society around Easter time. This is the time that those practising their professions in urban areas (outside their home towns) come home for the celebration of Easter. Easter is a ceremony that is celebrated in Ewe-dome as a very important event. It is not only an occasion to re-enact the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ; it is also an occasion for all to come together to plan and help in carrying out developmental projects in the area. It is, therefore, virtually an obligation for everybody to be present at home around Easter. The opportunity is then seized to perform the rite of initiation into womanhood since many would be present to witness and give their support in various ways in the performance of the rite. This being the case, a researcher into the rite found herself in a situation where she could not witness the rite at all the places all

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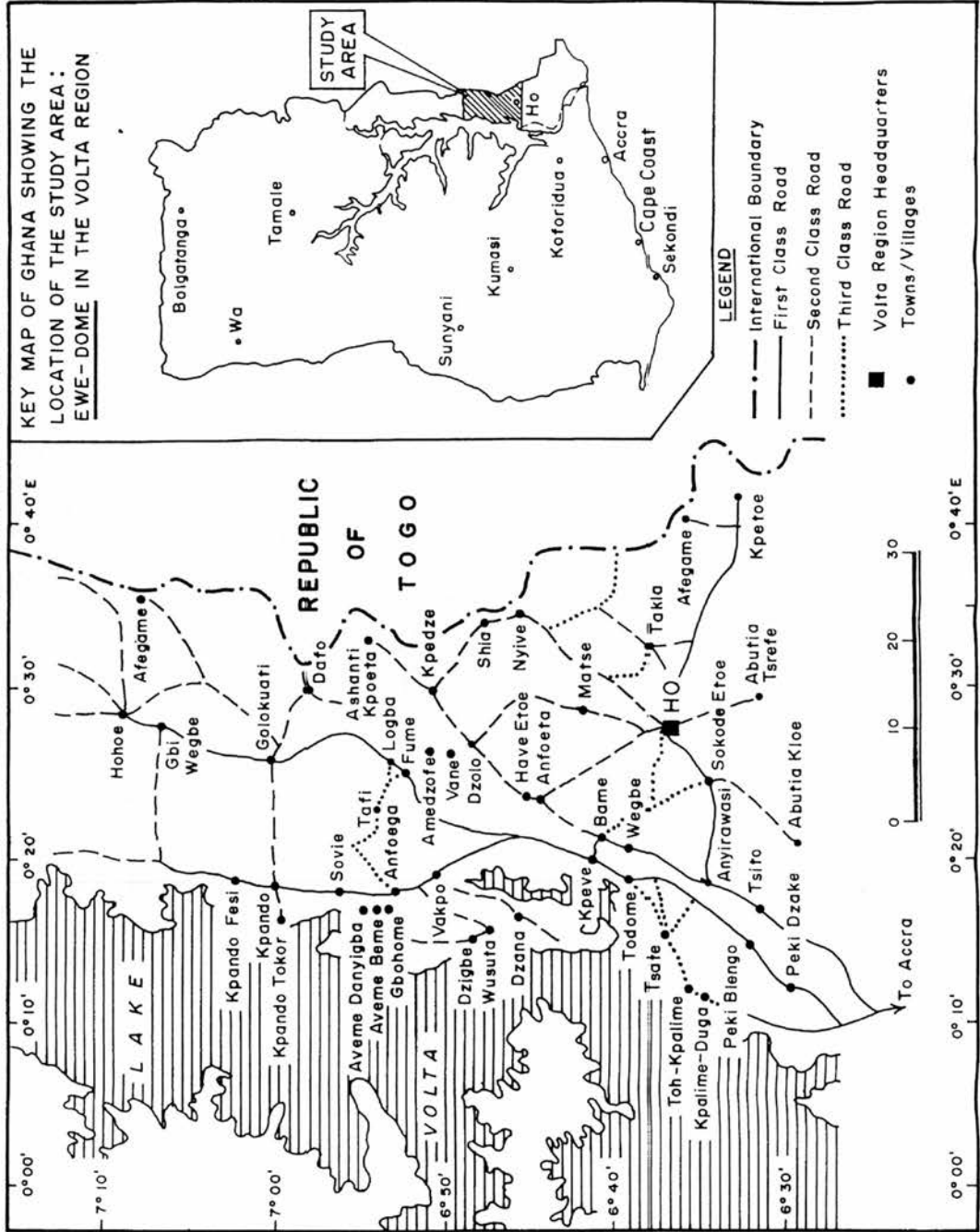
<sup>40</sup> The concept of "*Mawu-Lisa*" was raised and discussed after my interviews with Rt. Rev. Noah Dzobo. Refer to pages 27 - 30 for further details on this. Refer to the questions' guide in "Appendix"



being performed almost at the same time. This was particularly the case with Kpandu-Dzoanti where I had to rely on two assistants to observe the rite of initiation into womanhood (as practised in that year, 1997) while I was in Nyangbo traditional area. It should be noted, however, that the researcher had lived in Kpandu for four years and is familiar with the practices as up to 1994 and, therefore, needed only the processes as performed in 1997. There has not been much change at all. I had to carry out the interviews in the area soon after the on- the- spot observations by the two assistants.

# Map of Ewe-dome

FIG. A MAP SHOWING EWE-DOME AREA IN THE VOLTA REGION



## Chapter 2

### LOCATION, HISTORICAL BACKGROUND AND THE WORLD-VIEW OF EWE-DOME

#### 2.1. Location

Ewe-dome is found in the central part of the Volta Region of Ghana. It lies between Latitudes 6 ° 30' and 7 ° 15' North, and Longitudes 0 ° 10' and 1 ° 15' East. The Volta Region, one of the nine Regions in Ghana, is on the south-eastern side of the country. Ewe-dome is a sub-group of a larger ethnic group (the Ewe) which speaks a language that is also referred to as Ewe. The area lies between some non-Ewe tribes of Buem and Krachi on the northern side and the Anlo/Tongu Ewes of the south. The Volta river is to the west of it and forms a natural boundary between the Volta Region and the other Regions of the country. To the east of Ewe-dome lies the Republic of Togo. [Refer to map on page 18].

The term “Ewe-dome” does not refer to a separate ethnic group; it is generally used as such out of convenience. The term “dome”, an Ewe word, literally means “middle”, “inland”, or “central” and is used to describe the inland position of the area from the other Ewe groups of people, found mainly in the southern section of the Volta Region. Since the area lies at the northern side of the two other Ewe groups (the Anlo/Tongu Ewes), the term “Ewe-dome” is also used to refer to the Northern Ewe-speaking people of Ghana.<sup>41</sup> Thus the term is used to refer to both the geographical area and the people. There is, however, an important distinguishing feature between the Ewes that live at this northern/inland side and those of the southern side of the Region and that is, the two groups speak different variants of the same Ewe language. So that Ewes in Ghana are able to tell, through the accent, the area from which a fellow Ewe comes, that is, whether the person comes from Ewe-dome or from the southern section of the Ewe land. The variant forms are, however,

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<sup>41</sup> Kludze, for example, refers to the area as such, cf. Kludze A. K. P., *Ewe Law of Property*, London, Sweet & Maxwell, 1973, p 7

mutually intelligible to all Ewes. Another marked distinction between the Ewe-dome and the southern Ewe in the Region has to do with drumming and dancing. The Ewes in the southern section have a distinct form of traditional drumming and dancing, usually referred to as *Agbadza*. Those in Ewe-dome have what is known as *Akpese* (or *bɔbɔbɔ* in Kpandu traditional area). The two forms of drumming and modes of dancing are quite different from each other. Again, the southern Ewe have a staple food, *akple kple fetri-detsi* (a mixture of cooked corn and cassava dough served with okro soup). Those in Ewe-dome have as their staple food, *fufu*, a mixture of pounded cassava and plantain or cocoyam, served with palm-nut or light soup. In these days, however, the Ewe-dome eat as much of the *akple kple fetri-detsi* as the southern-Ewe, and vice-versa.

Ewe-dome comprises three administrative districts known as Ho, Hohoe and Kpandu districts. The districts are named after the towns that serve as the district headquarters. Each district is made up of a number of traditional areas. Ho district comprises 24 traditional areas; Hohoe district is made up of 18 traditional areas; while Kpandu district has 12 traditional areas. Each traditional area is in turn made up of various towns/villages with an average of 7 of these forming a traditional area. Aveme traditional area in the Kpandu district, for example, has 11 towns/villages while Tafi traditional area has 4. I have chosen at least one traditional area from each of the three districts for my study. The chosen traditional areas are: Akpini and Aveme traditional areas - both in the Kpandu district; Nyangbo traditional area - from Hohoe district; and Avatime traditional area of Ho district. The reason for the choice is that, even though the beliefs and practices of the people in Ewe-dome are basically the same, I need a sample that would be representative of all the districts. The chosen areas are also among those where people continue to perform the traditional rites. The total population figure for the chosen traditional areas is approximately 49,104.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> It should be noted that constraints of resources did not make it possible to conduct a census in 1994, one that would have been the latest for the country. The present figure for the chosen traditional areas is, therefore, obtained through the use of the growth rate of the Volta Region (2% per annum) and based on the 1984 population census. The figures were collected from the statistical offices at Ho and Accra.

It should be noted also that even though Ewe-dome, as said earlier, is a subgroup of a larger Ewe ethnic group, it is inhabited also by some pockets of non-Ewe people. These include the Tafi, the Nyangbo, the Avatime and Logba people. These people, however, adopt the Ewe language as a second language - in addition to their own languages. These other languages and the Ewe language all fall within the same language group, the Guan, of Ghana. Again, finding themselves in the same area, they do many things in common with the Ewes. For instance, they have similar cultural beliefs and practices and partake in the various ritual activities of the dominant Ewe. I am, therefore, including some of these groups of people also in my area of study - even though technically, they are non-Ewe. It is worthy of note also that the reasons for the performance of the rites of birth and initiation into womanhood, not only in Ewe-dome, but in Ghana as a whole, are almost the same, with minor variations in some details only.

The writer has also chosen the Ewe-dome area as she herself comes from the area. She can speak the Ewe language as well as one language of the other non-Ewe speaking people. Interpretative errors could, therefore, be avoided since there was no need for interpreters.

## *2.2. Vegetation And Occupation*

Ewe-dome lies in the tropical zone, and, therefore, has tropical climatic conditions. It has tropical rain forest as well as savannah. There are a number of mountain ranges in the area. The highest mountain in the country, Mt. Afadjato, is found in the region, reaching a height of 872 metres. There are two main seasons in Ewe-dome. There is a dry season which usually starts around November and ends in February/early March. The second season, the rainy season, starts soon after that - about the middle of March and runs through October. There is sometimes a break in the rains in May. It should be noted, however, that the fluctuation in climatic conditions all over the world in these days does affect this rainfall pattern in Ewe-dome. The rains may, therefore, come a bit earlier or later than the periods mentioned.

The area is predominantly a farming area and the farming activities follow the seasonal pattern. The land is usually cleared in January and February, awaiting the rains of March. Planting of crops then begins with the start of the rains. The main crops that are cultivated include cassava, yam, maize, cocoyam, banana and plantain. Palm trees are also cultivated. The palm tree is central to the diet and daily life of the people. Wine is produced out of it (palm-wine) and some of this is also brewed locally into *Akpeteshi*, also known as *Kele*, a liquor. The fruits of the palm tree are used in making palm-nut soup, while some of the oil (palm-oil), also got from the fruits, is used in stewed dishes. The palm-oil is also used in making soap. Several other uses are in fact got from the various parts of the palm tree.

Vegetables such as okro, spinach, tomatoes and pepper are also cultivated. Other crops include beans, groundnuts and brown rice. Some of the crops are used for subsistence while the surplus are sold for cash. Brown rice in particular is used in preparing many festive dishes, for example, in dishes that are used in the rite of initiation into womanhood. People prefer the use of traditionally grown foodstuff to imported food items in preparing festive dishes. Various reasons have been given for this which we shall discuss in later chapters.

Fishing is also done by those who live around the Volta River in particular, and provides a very good source of livelihood for the people. The fish is mostly smoked by women for sale as well as for consumption. Fresh fish is also eaten or sold. Other forms of occupation include pottery - found especially in Kpandu district - and blacksmithing. Weaving is also done using the locally made loom. Many of the traditional kente cloths that are presented to girls/women at the rite of initiation into womanhood, and farming garments (*adewu*) that are used by men are made out of this local weaving industry. Some of the women produce ochre.

Some of the people are also found in other forms of professional occupation. One may say that the percentage of literacy in the area, as at present, is quite high. This may be due to certain factors. For instance, there are no natural resources such as minerals of gold and diamond, found in other parts of the country; the area is also no longer conducive for the production of cocoa and coffee - the main cash crops of the country. Since the people cannot engage in the production of the above profitable

cash items, they turn to formal (classroom) education as the way to reach wealth and prestige. Some of those who come out of the formal schools have become professionals such as teachers, medical doctors, lawyers and accountants. Some of these practise their professions outside the area. One can also give credit for the formal education to missionary work. Ewe-dome is one of the first areas of the country which missionaries entered and affected. The North German Mission Society<sup>43</sup>, in particular, which had worked extensively in the area not only brought about the Gospel, but also, opened various schools in the area, among other forms of development. From the schools some have come out to take up the professions of the modern world.

### 2.3. *Historical Background Of The Area*

Ewe-dome, we have noted, consists largely of people who belong to a larger Ewe group - the Ewe ethnic group of West Africa. Many of the existing traditions (written and oral) have traced the origin of the Ewe ethnic group to a place called Ketu (in modern Benin).<sup>44</sup> Tracing the history beyond Ketu is a task that historians are yet to perform. This is because the narratives that we have so far about that do not seem to agree on the exact origin beyond this point. Kludze, for example, says that "Perhaps the Ewe migratory process, together with those of the neighbouring Akan, began somewhere in the Sudan and progressed in a south-westerly direction to avoid the dry Sahara".<sup>45</sup> Some contemporary Ewe writers have even attempted to trace the people back to the Biblical "Tower of Babel" story.<sup>46</sup>

The Ewes are not the only people who find it difficult to trace the "original" origin of a group of people. It must be a difficult adventure given the fact that oral tradition is all the people had and this needs very sophisticated interpretation. Many authorities, therefore, speak only in terms of "probabilities", in common with some

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<sup>43</sup> We shall write more about this Missionary Society in chapter 3.

<sup>44</sup> Vide Amenumey D. E. K., *The Ewe in Pre-Colonial Times: A Political History with special emphasis on the Anlo, Ge and Krepi*, Accra, Sedco Pub. Ltd., 1986; Ward W. E. F., *A History of Ghana*, George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1958; Verdom Michael, *The Abutia Ewe of West Africa: A Chieftdom that never was*, Berlin, Monton Publishers, 1983.

<sup>45</sup> Kludze A. K. P., *Ewe Law of Property*, London, Sweet & Maxwell, 1973, p 4

<sup>46</sup> Mamattah Charles M. K., *The Ewes of West Africa, Vol. 1: The Anlo-Ewes and their immediate neighbours*, Volta Research Publications, 1976, p 33.



other historians who do give possible places for such origins. The issue of the “original” home of the Ewes is, as at present, an unsettled one and this writer is, therefore, beginning the story only from the fairly well attested point of Ketu.

From Ketu, the Ewes came to settle in a town called Notsie (in Togo), sometimes referred to as Glime. “Glime” means “within walls” and Notsie was said to be surrounded by thick walls. At Notsie, the Ewes settled under a very despotic king, Agokoli, whose predecessors were said to be the first settlers or founding fathers of the Kingdom of Notsie. Agokoli was said to be a tyrant, and because of his tyrannical rule, the Ewes decided to flee from Notsie. Having left Notsie, “they divided into three main groups: a northern, a middle and a southern group”.<sup>47</sup> In Ghana today, the northern and middle groups together, to a large extent, form what is now being referred to as the Ewe-dome; while the southern section comprises mostly the Anlo and Tongu Ewes. In West Africa as a whole, Ewes are found mostly in Ghana, Togo and Benin. Some are also, however, found outside these areas in common with the movement of people all over the world, as a result of occupational and other activities. In spite of the various groupings, all the Ewes speak the same language (Ewe language). There are local minor variants of the language, but these are understood by all the people. In Ghana, the Anlo variant of the Ewe language is used as the basis of literary Ewe and, to use the words of Amenumey, this has “helped to diminish the linguistic difference between the various Ewe dialects”.<sup>48</sup>

There is some uncertainty about the actual date of migration of the Ewes to present day Ghana; but tradition puts it around the 17th century.<sup>49</sup>

#### 2.4. Social Organization

Ewe-dome community is made up of towns/villages known as *du* and each of these has a *dufia*, chief, who exercises political authority. We also have in these

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<sup>47</sup> Ward W. E. F., *A History of Ghana*, p 134

<sup>48</sup> Amenumey D. E. K., *The Ewe Unification Movement: A Political History*, The Ghana Universities Press, 1989, p 14

<sup>49</sup> Nukunya G. K., *Kinship and Marriage Among The Anlo-Ewe*, London, The Athlone Press, 1969, p 1; Also, Ward W. E. F., *A History*, p 52



towns/villages *fianyɔnu*, literally meaning female chief or queenmother, who helps the chief in his leadership roles, especially in matters that concern females.

The *dufia* and *fianyɔnu* also serve under the higher authority of a paramount chief (*fiaga*) who presides over a traditional area. A traditional area, we said earlier, is made up of an average of 7 towns/villages that are not far apart from each other. The kind of political authority that is exercised by the chiefs or paramount chiefs, however, is derived from consultations with councils of elders.

The household level comprises what we may call the nuclear type of family that is made up of husband, wife/wives and children living in an *afeme*, a house. Sometimes, two or more of such families are found in one residential unit but in different buildings. Husbands in these families are usually brothers who build houses in the same area, or occupy buildings belonging to the same father. Unmarried sisters and brothers are also sometimes found in some of such compounds.

There is what is known as the *Kɔ* (lineage), made up of families that are able to trace their descent to a paternal male ancestor. Some of the *Kɔwo* (lineages) come together to form what is known as *Sa*, clan. The oldest man in the *Sa*, known as the *samemetsitsi* takes charge of all matters affecting the *Sa*. He, for example, convenes meetings and presides over disputes among members of the *Sa*. He takes charge of issues concerning, for instance, distribution of land. Members of the *Sa* have rights to farm or build on land that belongs to the group and such portions of land are not to be sold or tampered with. *Sa* members are usually found in specific areas in each town. In these days, however, and owing to scarcity of land in the various clans, people have been building at various places where they could find land - outside their clans. It is the *Sa* heads that form the council of elders which help the chief in his administrative work.

Among the Ewe-dome, members of the maternal lineage are also regarded as *fometɔwo*, members of the family, and are, therefore, sometimes invited to join the paternal lineage in taking decisions about the various rites, including those of passage, that affect members of the kin-group.

Unlike the case of the Asante of Ghana, for example, where all the traditional areas have one king (the Asantehene) to whom all other chiefs owe allegiance, the

Ewe-dome do not have a single political unit, ruled by a king or monarch. Each *du* or town is, to a large extent, autonomous and scarcely do even the paramount chiefs of the traditional areas interfere in the affairs of the various *duwo* of their paramouncy. The people's experience with the despotic king Agokoli, referred to earlier, has become a legend that is used to justify the decentralization of power.

## 2.5. EWE-DOME BELIEFS ABOUT THE WORLD

The Ewe-dome, like other Ghanaian and indeed, most African peoples, believe that the world is made up not only of physical things that we perceive but also that the world has a spiritual dimension to it - a dimension that even overrules the physical. The observation made by Stephen Ezeanya is applicable to the Ewe-dome experience when he writes that:

It is the spiritual beings which actually control the world; indeed the world is a spiritual arena in which the various categories of spiritual beings display their powers. Man, in particular, is entirely dependent upon these spiritual beings.<sup>50</sup>

It is, in fact, even difficult to make a distinction between what should be regarded as spiritual and what is physical, since many things that appear physical are believed to also have spiritual dimensions to them. The physical is visible; the spiritual is invisible but at the same time does affect the visible.

### 2.5.1. The Concept of Mawu (God) In Ewe-dome

Ewe-dome mythology, from my findings, and as expressed in many contemporary works on the Ewe of Ghana<sup>51</sup> has it that the world came into existence through the activity of a great deity, *Mawu*. *Mawu* is usually associated with the sky, and is referred to as *Mawu dzifotɔ* (the great God of the sky); as *Ayɛ* (literally meaning "the sky" - in Avatime area). The name *Mawu*, in one etymological sense, is

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<sup>50</sup> Ezeanya Stephen, "God, Spirits And The Spirit World" in Dickson Kwesi & Ellingworth Paul, (eds.), *Biblical Revelation And African Beliefs*, London, Lutterworth Press, 1969, p 36

<sup>51</sup> For example, Gaba C. R., "The Idea of A Supreme Being Among The Anlo People of Ghana" in *Journal of Religion In Africa*, 11, 1(1964), p 64; Fiawoo D. E. K., "The Influence of contemporary Social changes on the Magico-Religious concepts and Organization of the Southern Ewe-speaking peoples of Ghana" Ph.D. Thesis, University of Edinburgh, 1957, p 49

derived from two Ewe terms “*amea*”, meaning “person”, and “*wu*” (to exceed or surpass all others). *Mawu*, in this sense, literally means “the person or one who surpasses all others”. In a second etymological sense the name *Mawu* also means “one who does not kill”. In this sense, *Mawu* the source of all that exists, is believed to be one who will not destroy His own creation.

Attempts have been made by some ethnographers and others to trace the origin and find out more about the concepts that are held about *Mawu*. Rt. Rev. Dzobo, for example, writing on some beliefs of the Ewe of West Africa, and citing the writings of some earlier writers such as Mercier and Herskovits, sees *Mawu* in dualistic terms; known as *Mawu-Lisa*. According to him, *Mawu* (in the god-head *Mawu-Lisa*) is the female principle while *Lisa* is the male principle. He writes:

*Mawu*, the female principle, is the symbol of the earth, harmony, peace, care, fertility, motherhood, gentleness, creativity, forgiveness, rest, joy, truth and freshness. *Lisa*, the male principle, is power, warlike or otherwise, labour, strength and toughness, he is the principle of justice, steadfastness, pain and suffering, security and human striving.<sup>52</sup>

The main union of the dual deity, according to Dzobo, “is said to be twin-like and sexual, that is, the relationship between the opposites in the duality is like the relationship between man and woman, husband and wife, or between the two drums of talking drum...It is unity in duality”.<sup>53</sup> Sometimes also, Dzobo continues, *Mawu-Lisa* is thought of as an androgynous self-fertilizing being. He quotes Mercier in support of his views:

In the dual *Mawu-Lisa*, *Mawu* is the female and *Lisa* the male...they are regarded as twins, and their union is indeed the basis of the organization of the world. Sometimes their connexion is expressed more definitely by the conception of an androgynous, self-fertilizing being”.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> Dzobo N. K., “Black Civilization As Cultural Product of Conceptual Creativity”, a paper presented at the 1977 World Black and African Festival of Arts and Culture, Lagos, Nigeria. Also from interviews held with him by this researcher, Ho, 14th January, 1997; No. 26 in Bibliography.

<sup>53</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>54</sup> Quoted by Dzobo from Mercier P. “The Fon of Dahomey” in Forde Daryll, (ed.), *African Worlds: Studies in the Cosmological Ideas and Social Values of African Peoples*; London, Oxford University Press, 1954, p 219

From my interviews in Ewe-dome, the concept of a dual *Mawu-Lisa* does not seem to be one which the people know. Some said that that concept of a High God known as *Mawu-Lisa* is not an Ewe-dome concept. "It is for the Dahomey people", they emphasized.<sup>55</sup> Some had not heard about the concept at all. The *Mawu* they said they know to be the source of everything is *Mawuga* (the great *Mawu*) of *dzime* or *yame* (the sky). They know there are *trɔwo* (translated in English as gods and more about which we shall write later) who also work to influence life in various ways. These can be good to a person if one lives according to their regulations and would punish one if one does something that is against their will. The *Mawu-Lisa* concept is a Dahomean concept, they emphasized.

In a later discussion with Rev. Dzobo<sup>56</sup> concerning what the people had said, that is, that the *Mawu-Lisa* concept is not an Ewe-dome concept, Rev. Dzobo said that the apparent emphatic portrayal of God as *Mawu* among the people may be to emphasize the deity's creative nature; in his words "God's nature has been characterized as mainly female (*Mawu* is the female aspect of the godhead *Mawu-Lisa*) to emphasize the fact that he/she is a dynamic creative power"<sup>57</sup>.

In my further readings about the concept of "*Mawu-Lisa*" from the sources quoted by Rev. Dzobo<sup>58</sup>, I realized that Mercier, for example, has it in his very introduction to the article that was quoted by Rev. Dzobo, that the Fon people of Dahomey about whom he was writing:

constituted the nucleus of the former kingdom of Dahomey, one of the most notable kingdoms of the Slave Coast. Culturally and linguistically they belong to the Aja group - often erroneously called Ewe.<sup>59</sup>

<sup>55</sup> Tsiami Kwesi Amedzɔku of Tsito, (chiefs' spokesman, No. 12 in Bibliography), for example, told me that: "Some in the southern section of the Volta Region use the term "*Sogbo-Lisa*" (not *Mawu-Lisa*) to address a *trɔ* (a god) and that he did not understand the terms (3rd February, 1997 No.); Afetɔ Wagba of Vane, a traditional religious believer, also said a similar thing and thought the words must be foreign terms, "from Dahomey area". He also did not understand the terms. (20th January, 1997, No. 45 in Bibliography). The same view was expressed by Rev. George Amoah, Accra, (30th January, 1997, No. 14 in Bibliography). The concept of a dual-deity, *Mawu-Lisa*, that I was asking about, is not an Ewe-dome concept, they all emphasized.

<sup>56</sup> Discussions with Rev. Dzobo, Ho, 4th February, 1997.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

<sup>58</sup> He, in fact, directed me to read more on the concept from the books he had used.

<sup>59</sup> Mercier P., "The Fon of Dahomey" in Forde Daryll, (ed.), *African Worlds: Studies in the Cosmological Ideas and Social Values of African Peoples*, London, Oxford University Press, 1954, p 210

The implications of the above observation are that whatever is quoted from the writings of Mercier, in this case, is not coming out of the Ewe context. It belongs to the Aja group of the Fon of Dahomey. Mercier in fact puts it elsewhere in the same writing that: “the dual deity *Mawu-Lisa* came from Aja”<sup>60</sup> - the non-Ewe group.

The other accounts given by the Herskovits, that is, Melville Herskovits and Frances Herskovits, which have also been cited by Rev. Dzobo, are of a complex of narratives about Dahomey religious beliefs. According to the Herskovits, “the mythological accounts vary”. They stated that:

One version we collected tells that Mawu is androgynous and that Lisa is the son of Mawu. Another relates that Mawu and Lisa are two beings in one, one-half a female whose eyes are the moon, the other a male, whose eyes are the sun.... It is said, too, that Mawu is a man, and in one myth we collected, Lisa figures as the grandmother of the heavenly trickster (Legba).<sup>61</sup>

The very adherents of the *Mawu-Lisa* religious group in Dahomey, among others, do not also seem to see *Mawu-Lisa* as the creator of the world since, and according to the Herskovits, the world, to the adherents “was created by a god who was at once male and female... This god is neither Mawu nor Lisa, but one named Nana Buluku”.<sup>62</sup> One, in fact, needs to read the whole book to see the complexity of ideas that have been expressed. From the accounts, one can say that the concept held about *Mawu-Lisa* among the Fon of Dahomey is not a straightforward, systematic or harmonized one. *Mawu-Lisa* may be the name of the Sky-pantheon, and/or may be the children of Nana Buluku (androgynous). Lisa may be the sky-god, and/or god of the sun, and/or father of all elements, and/or the grandmother of the heavenly trickster, Legba. *Mawu* (in the concept) may be the face of the moon and/or the Mother of Lisa, and so on.<sup>63</sup> It is not easy holding a definite concept about *Mawu-Lisa*. Again, we must note that all of this comes from work centred on Dahomey.

Even though one may not rule out inter-cultural influences and importation of various beliefs and practices from one area to another, one may say that it is difficult

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<sup>60</sup> Ibid., p 214

<sup>61</sup> Herskovits Melville J. & Herskovits Frances S., *An Outline of Dahomean Religious Belief*, Reprinted with the permission of the American Anthropological Association, Kraus Corporation, New York, 1964, p 11

<sup>62</sup> Ibid., p 14

<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

to come to a definite conclusion about the issue. Gaba, in his research among the Anlo-Ewe of the southern section of the Region, has also noted that “‘Mawu’ is the Anlo name for the Supreme Being. This same word is used by Ewe neighbours to designate their Supreme Being”. He, however, observed elsewhere in the same work that two words “Segbo” and “Lisa” which are very rarely used and mainly by traditional priests as praise names for the Supreme Being, are not original Anlo words. They probably were acquired, Gaba says, “during the westward journey of the Anlo people to their present home”.<sup>64</sup>

All that one can say at this point is that the Fon language, one may note, even though it contains some Ewe words, is not comprehensible to the Ewe. The word *Lisa*, for example, is not found in the Ewe-dome language. The nearest to that word is *Litsa* which means Chameleon<sup>65</sup>. One is, therefore, not clear in one’s mind what the word *Lisa* would mean if related to *Mawu* in Ewe-dome. One may also add that a people’s mythological accounts about existence, as Gilbert Ansre, a linguistic theologian, has rightly advised this writer, “may not be monolithic, simple and systematic”<sup>66</sup>. They may also not be static. The ideas or beliefs may be going through changes out of various experiences and influences in nature.

We are, therefore, working with the information gathered from this research finding that the Ewe-dome, both Christian and non-Christian, as at the time of writing, believe in the existence of a God called *Mawu*. They believe *Mawu* to be the ultimate creator of the universe. The people regard *Mawu* as a being who cannot be seen - one whose ontological nature may, therefore, even be difficult to conceive. The Ewe-dome regard *Mawu* as *Miatɔ ga le dzi me* (our big Father in heaven) and I am, therefore, using the pronoun He for *Mawu*. *Mawu* is acknowledged as the source of existence on earth. *Mawu* is talked of as being in the sky but the frequency with which people refer to *Mawu* in difficult and pleasant situations seems to suggest that, *Mawu* is also not too far from His created beings. One hears people shout “Mawue!”

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<sup>64</sup> Gaba C. R., “Anlo Traditional Religion: A Study of the Anlo Traditional Believer’s conception of and communion with the ‘Holy’.” Ph.D. Thesis, University of London, 1965, pp 64 -65

<sup>65</sup> In which case the word *Litsa*, if used of *Mawu*, may be seen as an honorific term to mean for example, that *Mawu*, like a Chameleon, has eyes that can see things even from behind Him.

<sup>66</sup> Interview with Prof. Gilbert Ansre at Medina - Accra, on the 12th of February, 1997; No. 15 in Bibliography.



when they find themselves in disastrous situations; or Akpe na Mawu - Thanks to Mawu - when they are delivered from difficult situations. Even though Mawu is seen as being in *dzime* (the sky), Mawu is also said to be everywhere. There is, for example, in Ewe-dome, the saying that Mawu le afisiafi - Mawu is everywhere - even though He is also at the same time seen as being in the sky.

Mawu's existence is also taken for granted and arguments as found elsewhere about the existence or non-existence of such a God were treated as ridiculous - whenever such issues were raised with my respondents.

### 2.5.2. *Trɔwo In Ewe-dome*

There is the belief in traditional Ewe-dome society that Mawu does not work out His sustaining activities of the world alone. There are other spirit powers that help in performing various roles in the cosmological framework, beings that are not unknown to Mawuga (the great God). These spirit powers are known in Ewe-dome as *trɔwo* (plural), *trɔ* (singular). How did the *trɔwo* come into existence? This was a question that I asked many of my informants. They are *dzɔ kple anyiwo*, meaning, they came with the original creation of the earth, some said. Some also found my question to be too difficult and told me they did not know how the *trɔwo* came into existence. Some said the *trɔwo* are *Mawu fe viwo*, meaning, "they are Mawu's own created children or beings"<sup>67</sup>. The *trɔwo* are seen as helping in controlling human behaviour. They play various roles. They can provide the barren with children, heal diseases, help people in finding settlements, can "catch" criminals, can also cause diseases and even death, and so on. The *trɔwo* are believed to influence life either for good or ill, depending on attitudes towards them. Some traditional religious believers said that all the *trɔwo* in Ewe-dome are good, and have their regulations, which if followed, would bring good rewards for the devotees. To transgress against their regulations, however, is to bring untold hardships on those involved. Some of them, however, said that some *trɔwo* are inherently bad. At Have Etoe, for example, it was said that there was one particular *trɔ* called *Dzahadroe* that was fond of killing

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<sup>67</sup> The view of some traditional religious believers.



children who cried to disturb him. Upon divination and finding out the cause of the death of many children at the time, the devotees had to abandon this trɔ.

Trɔwo can be identified with particular areas and names. They can also, however, be transported from one place to another. In the new location they can retain their old names or have new names given to them. Again, even though the trɔwo are generally believed to perform certain specific functions, sometimes, the same trɔwo are called upon to perform other functions.

Trɔwo are usually associated with such phenomena as mountains, rivers, trees and animals - the trɔ spirits residing in the objects. Some rivers in Avatime for example, Katatabui and Opremi in Vane-Avatime, are believed to have some trɔ spirits. Monkeys in Tafi-Atome are regarded as trɔwo and are, therefore, not to be killed.

A few think that the name for a god, “whether High or Low, is trɔ”<sup>68</sup>. The word trɔ, in Ewe, etymologically means “to change” or “to transform”, thus, a trɔ, it is said, is one that transforms a person, life or situation. Many in Ewe-dome would associate the word trɔ only with the divinities that are less in rank to the ultimate Mawu. Let me mention at this point that many of those who are Christians in the area would not associate the trɔwo with Mawuga at all. They would not also see the trɔwo as children of Mawu or relate Mawu to the trɔwo in any way. They see the trɔwo as simply demons, collaborators of Satan, that are out to destroy man and the good deeds of Mawu. These are the sorts of answers I had from some Christians in the course of my “philosophical” probing. Suspicious eyes were, in fact, raised at me by some Christians as I tried to find out more about the concept of trɔwo. “But why are you so interested in them; be careful you do not bring back Osofo Komfo Damuah and his activities”<sup>69</sup>, some jokingly warned me.

The trɔwo are given devotional attention, and sacrifices and offerings are made to them. The devotion that is given to the trɔwo suggests that they are seen as ends in themselves, that is, as if they are not performing works on behalf of their

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<sup>68</sup> Interview with Rev. Dzobo, for example; 4th February, 1997.

<sup>69</sup> Osofo Komfo Damuah was a Ghanaian ex-Roman Catholic priest who in 1980s and 1990s tried to revitalize what he believed to be the Traditional Religion of Africa. He established a religious institution, the “Afrikania Mission”.

creator, Mawu. “Are the trɔwo performing intermediary roles between Mawu and human beings or are they acting on their own?” To this question, some of my respondents, mainly traditional religious believers, said “the trɔwo are able, and should not be toyed with”<sup>70</sup>. Are sacrifices and supplications made to the trɔwo meant for them to act, or are they to be passed on to Mawu for Him to act? To this question, Afetɔ Wagba said: “The supplications are meant for the trɔwo to act, not to be carried over to Mawu. The supplicants know that the trɔwo are able, and that is why they come to them with their supplications”<sup>71</sup>. Some said that the trɔwo are believed to give instant justice or judgement, while Mawu is sometimes slow in His acts towards human beings. People would, therefore, sometimes go to the trɔwo rather than call on Mawu.

Trɔwo with shrines dedicated to their service have priests and priestesses. A priest is known as trɔnu, while a priestess is called a trɔsi. The word “nu” means mouth, and “trɔnu”, therefore, literally means “the mouth of a trɔ”. A trɔnu is seen as the mouthpiece of a trɔ, one who explains the wishes or commands to the devotees. Trɔsi also literally means “the wife of a trɔ”, “si” meaning “wife”. Thus, a “trɔsi” is someone who is seen as “married” to a trɔ, but one who also performs similar roles as a trɔnu.

### 2.5.3. *Dzo and Adze spirits*

#### 2.5.3.1. *Dzo*

Other spirit entities in the cosmological ideas of the Ewe-dome include those of dzo and adze. The dzo power (for which one is not able to find an equivalent word in English), in general, is believed to be a potent power that can be tapped for protective purposes. Many of the dzotɔwo (owners of the dzo power) are, however, feared greatly in the society since they can use the power also to harm or even kill. Etymologically the word dzo means “fire”; so that the word connotes the destruction

<sup>70</sup> Interviews with Tɔgbe Wagba of Vane, 20th January, 1997; and Tɔgbe Kofi Tosa of Nyagbo, 29th March, 1997; No. 42 in the Bibliography, (Traditional Religious believers).

<sup>71</sup> Ibid., A similar view was expressed by Afetɔ Deh Adzewoda, a traditional religious believer, Kpandu, 20th April, 1997; No. 23 in Bibliography.

that it can cause (like fire). The *dzo* power, it is said, can be wrapped in tangible objects. These are tied in strings around various parts of the body or are hanged around various places for various purposes. Some, therefore, refer to them as *Bo* (string). The power *dzo* is possessed most often secretly, by men especially, for various purposes. Some of the *dzotɔwo* are healers. Some, it is believed, can use the power, for example, to win the hearts of girls who would otherwise ignore them. Nukunya's findings among the Anlo-Ewe apply to the Ewe-dome also when he says that: "It is believed that when it is applied to a girl she falls so madly in love with the applicant as to make it almost impossible for anyone else, even her parents, to persuade her against him".<sup>72</sup> This kind of *dzo* is, however, believed not to work for long, for the girl eventually comes back to her senses and tends to hate the man.

The *dzo* power, it is believed, can also be used to run away from enemies. The power can, therefore, serve many purposes. The owner of the *dzo* has to follow certain directives. He could be killed by the power if he does not obey the rules that are attached to its use. Some said that periodic sacrifices have to be made to the power in order to have continuous expectations from it. Some lorry and other accidents in the area, for example, are attributed to the *dzo* power. It is believed that some of the *dzotɔwo* do make contracts with those from whom they derive the power, to provide them with periodic sacrifices, some of the sacrifices which take the form of the accidents.

#### 2.5.3.2. *Adzɛ (Witchcraft)*

There is also a belief in the existence of a spirit power referred to as *adzɛ* (witchcraft). Those who possess the power are known as *adzɛtɔwo*. The craft is believed to be acquired through various means. Some may acquire it through coming into contact with items that are used very close to the skin, for example, headkerchiefs, hair and beads. It is said to be acquired also through food. It can be given out freely and it can also be bought, or acquired inadvertently. In the latter case, some are believed to acquire the craft through certain forms of protective medicine that they had bought. Such people, in other words, did not intend to be

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<sup>72</sup> Nukunya G. K., *Kinship And Marriage Among The Anlo-Ewe*, p 83.

witches; but the protective medicine is able to transform the person into a witch. Such people become sorry but are unable to reverse the situation and die horrible deaths should they refuse to continue with the practice. There are others, who out of envy or hatred, acquire witchcraft to cause havoc or kill those they envy or hate.

The activities of witches are said to be carried out mostly in the night (even though sometimes also during the day). Witches are believed to leave their physical bodies mysteriously at night and travel, using certain familiars like, millipedes, goats, owls and other kinds of birds. An owl in particular that cries in the night is believed to be a familiar of a witch, on nocturnal activities. Witches are said to emit flicks of fire as they fly. Witchcraft is usually associated with women. Some men can, however, also be sorcerers, known in Ewe-dome as *dzoduametwo*, and perform similar acts like witches.

The victims of witchcraft are believed to be struck dead instantly or after protracted diseases. Many evils of the society are laid at the doors of witches. The Ewe-dome are not unique in having such a belief about witchcraft. Idowu, for example, puts it that : "In Africa, it is idle to begin with the question whether witches exist or not".<sup>73</sup> The description of evils that can be caused by witchcraft, as given by Omoyajowo, according to beliefs of the Ibo of Nigeria, fit into the Ewe-dome situation when he writes:

They are believed to be of danger to men in good health and to pregnant women, as they search for new souls to take to their guilds...the victim is shared out among the members according to rank and he dies only when his heart has been reached....They may also cut their meat from the leg and so give the sufferer ulcers.<sup>74</sup>

Witches do not cause physical bodily pain and death only they can also cause poverty, making people fail to realise the fruits of their labour. They can also make people drunkards, and so on.

The problem of evil, why there should be evil in a world created and governed by a loving and all-powerful God, an issue that is of much concern to Westerners, is therefore, not so much of a philosophical problem to the Ewe-dome.

<sup>73</sup> Idowu Bolaji, *African Traditional Religion: A Definition*, SCM Press, 1973, p 175.

<sup>74</sup> Omoyajowo Akin J., "What is Witchcraft?" in Ade.Adegbola E. A., (ed.), *Traditional Religion in West Africa*, Ibadan, Daystar Press, 1983, p 318 - 320

The witches are to be blamed for many evil occurrences. *Mawu* can be angry and punish people; some of the evils are also, we noted, caused by *trɔwo*, depending especially on a person's attitude to them; some are caused by a person's own evil ways, and others by the ancestors - about whom we have more to say. *Mawu* alone, even if He is seen as the ultimate creator, is not, therefore, blamed for every kind of evil in the society.

#### 2.5.4. *Amegbetɔ, A Person, in Ewe-dome*

A human being, by Ewe-dome traditional beliefs, is said to have come from *Amedzɔfe* (*Dzɔfe*), also referred to as *Sefe*, a place of human creation. There is no clear idea as to the exact location of this place. After the creation of a person by *Mawu*, *gbɔgbɔ* (breath of life), which is part of *Mawu*'s own creation, is given to the created being to become *amegbetɔ*. The word *amegbetɔ* comes from two Ewe words "ame" and "agbetɔ". "Ame" means a moulded being and "agbetɔ" means one with life. "Amegbetɔ", therefore, means "a moulded being with life". *Amegbetɔ* is essentially seen as having *ɲutila* (flesh) and *gbɔgbɔ* (breath of life) but he or she does not leave the place of creation with the *ɲutila* and *gbɔgbɔ* alone. Attached to a person are other categories regarding a person's existence. These are known as *dzɔgbese*, *aklama* and *gbetsi*.

##### 2.5.4.1. *Dzɔgbese - The concept of Destiny*

There is the belief that *amegbetɔ* (the human being) comes to this world not only with the *ɲutila* (flesh) and *gbɔgbɔ* (breath of life) but also with a *dzɔgbese*, a divine package, given to the person by *Mawu*. *Mawu* is also sometimes referred to as *Se* (with a capital "S"). Thus, the two names, *Mawu* and *Se* are sometimes used interchangeably.<sup>75</sup> The *dzɔgbese* is given on the day of a person's birth (*dzɔgbe*) and it is that on which the person's life is ordered. In other words, it is the *dzɔgbese* that

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<sup>75</sup> The word *se*, if written with a small letter means "law"; it can also mean "listen" - depending on the context in which it is used.

determines a person's way of life in the world. One's successes and failures are all believed to be part of the package of the *dzɔgbese*. Each and everyone also has his or her own *dzɔgbese* hence the saying in Ewe that *Dzɔgbesee (See) doa ame da, ametɔ metɔ* - meaning, everybody has been sent into the world with a particular divine destiny. Whoever seems to be very successful in life (usually with little effort) is said to have come with a good *dzɔgbese* while those who seem to have an overdose of misfortunes are said to be suffering from bad *dzɔgbese*. A person's life-span, manner of life and of death are seen as part of the *dzɔgbese*. *Dzɔgbese* is also sometimes referred to as *Xɔve* - literally meaning, what one has come into the world with. Such expressions about *dzɔgbese* seem to connote that a person is born with a predestined life, determined by Mawu; as if a person's life is tied up with fate.

The Ewe-dome, however, have this other belief that certain forces here on earth can influence a person's life. Evil forces such as *adzɛtɔwo* (witches) and *dzoduametɔwo* (sorcerers) can frustrate an otherwise good *dzɔgbese*; while a person's own attitude to life can also affect his or her *dzɔgbese* either for good or bad ends. To find out more about a person's *dzɔgbese*, especially in cases of persistent failure and misfortunes, diviners (*nubialawo*) are consulted to ascertain the cause or causes. The *nubialawo* are believed to have certain powers by which they can obtain knowledge about things in the spirit realm. Thus, it is believed that they can explain the cause and course of events. If a person's persistent misbehaviour or failure is traced to his or her *dzɔgbese*, appropriate rites will have to be performed to rectify the situation.

One may, therefore, say that even though the concept of *dzɔgbese* may seem to point to fatalism, in actual fact, a person's pattern of life, for the Ewe-dome, cannot be said to be strictly governed by fate, for, fate connotes that some event is bound to occur and that nothing whatsoever can avert it. Indeed, there is a popular saying in Ewe-dome that: "*Ne Mawu do asi na ame ha la, wogblɔna be adabraka (de le dzi)*" - literally meaning, "even if Mawu has fixed out prices for human beings, they can still ask Him to reduce the prices". The deeper meaning is that: even if one's life seems to be predestined by Mawu, one can still do something about it, that is, one



can still work out things in one's favour. Other evidence for this belief - which amounts to a rejection of fatalism - can be seen in the fact that efforts are made to educate a person in the society, in order for one to live a virtuous life. Another evidence of the belief can be seen in the rite of initiation into womanhood, aspects of which are meant to expiate any evil influence from the life of the girl. Thus, in Ewe-dome, an individual is not left to fate. Again, those with persistent misbehaviour are repeatedly punished for their misdeeds. This implies that they are held to be responsible to themselves and to others in the society for their actions. The concept of *dz(gbese*, therefore, does not preclude the notion of a person having free-will to choose to do right or wrong, nor that of individual responsibility.

Furthermore, the Ewe-dome do have notions of causality. Every situation in Ewe-dome is believed to have a cause, or to be the effect of some other event(s). The causes of things, especially those that seem to be inexplicable, are often attributed to supernatural phenomena. Things, therefore, do not occur by accident. Every event has a cause. This concept of causality, however, is not the same as what is sometimes described as hard or closed determinism and does not preclude also the concept of free-will. The Ewe-dome believes that with the possible exception of death, one has the power to redirect the course of events or change the nature of events by introducing different sets of factors, both natural and supernatural, into a situation. We can, therefore, conclude that the concept of destiny does not point to fatalism. Neither does the Ewe-dome concept of every event having a cause point to helplessness. The concept of *dz(gbese*, however, as some have observed, helps in preventing people from envying others or copying blindly the way of life of others, as each one is made to know that he or she has his or her own divine pattern of life on earth.

To a very large extent, other Ghanaian ethnic groups also hold similar views regarding destiny, as can be seen in the Akan concept of *ηkrabea* or *hyebea* and the Dangme concept of *σεσεε*, for example. They both deny fatalism but uphold free-will. For instance, Gyekye writes:

Because *ηkrabea* (destiny) expresses only the basic attributes of the individual, and because *ηkrabea* is general and not specific, human actions



are not necessitated; this fact gives viability and meaningfulness to the concept of choice.<sup>76</sup>

Kudadjie, writing on the Dangme concept of *sesɛɛ* also concludes that:

...the concept of *sesɛɛ* and various Dangme beliefs and practices demonstrate not only that freewill and determinism are both true; but also that the two are not necessarily mutually exclusive. Within what has been determined, there is freedom.<sup>77</sup>

#### 2.5.4.2. *Aklama - Guardian Spirit*

A second spiritual entity that is believed to be tied up with a person's life is known as *aklama* - the guardian spirit. It is that which is sent along with the human being to serve as the person's spiritual guard on earth. *Aklama* protects and gives security to a person. It is not uncommon to hear people saying whenever a person has come out of a dangerous situation unhurt, that: *aklama di ne* (the guardian spirit has helped the person). In Avatime traditional area, *Aklama* is referred to as *Esobola*. Women are told after childbirth, for example: *Wɔ esobola ewɔa lixɔe*, meaning that they must give thanks to their spiritual guardian. When a person has escaped unhurt from a car accident, for instance, a day is set aside to give thanks to the person's *aklama*. The person's head is shaved (these days just a bit of the hair is cut), and one dresses in whitish clothing to receive well-wishers. The white colour is a sign of victory. It is believed also that *Aklama* likes people who are cheerful, neat, and who do not brood over their misfortunes.

#### 2.5.4.3. *Gbetsi*

The Ewe-dome believe also that there is a spiritual entity that follows a person from the spirit world into this world. This entity, *gbetsi*, usually connotes a bad influence, and manifests itself in an undesirable way. A person who behaves in an unusual way is believed to be suffering from *gbetsi* (*gbetsivɔ*) - evil *gbetsi*. People

<sup>76</sup> Gyekye Kwame, *An Essay on African philosophical thought*, p 121

<sup>77</sup> Kudadjie Joshua N., "Some implications of the Dangme concept of *Sesɛɛ* for moral philosophy and moral Education", in *QUEST: Philosophical Discussions*, Vol. X1, No. 1 - 2, 1997, p 13

who are so regarded include: a child or person who is persistently troublesome, crying, lazy and so on; and a person who is always very quiet at home and who, even at marriageable age, would not like to see a member of the opposite sex or entertain such a person in any way. For such people, a rite known as *gbetsidede* - removing the *gbetsi* - must be performed in order to rectify the situation. Parents, relatives or other concerned people try to help through divine means to seek the cause of the problem. Appropriate rites, prescribed by the diviner and usually fixed, are then performed for the person to bring him or her back to normalcy. The rites are also meant to work out the person's life within the framework of one's *dzɔgbese*. In some localities, during the rite of initiation into womanhood, steps are taken to shout out any *gbetsivɔ* in the life of a girl before she enters into adulthood<sup>78</sup>. It should be noted, however, that some Christians do not accept this concepts of *gbetsi* and *Aklama*. To them, *Mawu* made a human person in the form of *ɲutila* and *gbɔgbɔ* only. That seems to have come from missionary teaching about a human person being made up of body and soul/spirit. The *gbɔgbɔ* is regarded as soul/spirit and the *ɲutila* as the body. Beyond these are no other concepts about a person.

#### 2.5.5. Concepts About Death (*Ku*) and the Hereafter.

The Ewe-dome say "*Ame dzɔ na ku, dzɔ na agbe*", meaning, a person is destined for death just as he or she is for life. This saying in Ewe points to the fact that in Ewe-dome as, indeed, in all other societies, death is a fact of human existence; it is part of the human condition. However, in Ewe-dome, the attitude towards death is ambivalent. On the one hand, there is an Ewe-dome belief that after a person's earthly life, one returns to *Tsiefe* (a place of death). The return is a natural fact of existence. The process of creation is a perpetual one, and so is the return to *Tsiefe*. Death does not completely annihilate a person, and the dead are not seen as beings who have ceased to be; rather they are seen as people who have been transported to another sphere of life, to continue living another form of life. There is

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<sup>78</sup> This ritual was performed at Aveme-Beme on one such occasion, witnessed by the researcher; 12th April, 1997.

still a flow of communication between those at *Tsiefe* and those left behind in the flesh on earth. It is believed also that the dead live a life that is a replica of the one they lived here while on earth.

Even though death is seen as part of the ontology of existence and, therefore, natural, it is on the other hand, also seen by the people as the outcome of the works of evil forces like witchcraft and sorcery - hence unnatural. It is in fact in attitudes towards death that one can clearly see what the Ewe-dome mean by everything having a cause. Every death in Ewe-dome must have a cause. Every person is believed to be destined for death just as a person is for life. At the same time, however, very few deaths, indeed, those of the very old people only, are accepted as having natural causes. A person may die through an accident. All the physical facts or evidence may be known. But, to the people, there may be some "other causes" to the death. Every person is expected to live up to a ripe age or grow very old before his or her death. For a person to die at an age that is less than, say, seventy years means there must be "something" behind that death. Either the person is bewitched by someone who hated or envied him or her; or the person must have committed a heinous crime against the ancestors for which he or she is punished; the *trɔwo* must have killed the person for some offence; or in short, the death must have a "cause" behind it - deeper than the empirical evidence that is known.

Death, for those who are not old, is simply seen as a terrible thing that robs people of the desire to accomplish set goals on earth. It makes people to lose loved ones - at least physically the living will no more see or feel the presence or get the needed help that they used to have from the deceased person. The phenomenon of death is, therefore, hated even though it is seen as a natural fact of existence.

*Tsiefe* is the general term used for the place of the dead. However, according to the beliefs, *Tsiefe* seems to be divided into sections for different categories of people. There is a place for those who have made significant contributions to the welfare of the society, have died in old age (preferably but not compulsorily, with children) and have died through "natural deaths", that is, they must not have died through such occurrences as suicide, drowning or madness. Such persons are regarded as the *tɔgbuiwo* and *mamawo* (ancestors). There is also a section for those

who died through what is regarded as *ametsiavawo*, literally meaning, those who fell in war; for example, those who died through childbirth, drowning and various forms of accidents. A third category, of those who died through ignoble phenomena such as suicide, abortion and sorcery or witchcraft also do have their place at *Tsiefe*. In fact in the olden days, different cemeteries were made for these categories of people in every town. The bodies of sorcerers and witches in particular were maltreated in various ways before the remains were sent to their place of burial. It is said that people buried at wrong places would give lots of worries to the living, as they were not able to find their abode at *Tsiefe*. Care was, therefore, taken to bury people at places they belonged. Such a discrimination in places of burial is waning nowadays and all are buried in the same cemetery - irrespective of the nature of death or kind of life that is lived. However, chiefs and some elders are still buried in their homes. It is interesting to note also that in some of the towns, the various Christian denominations have separate burying grounds for their dead; while special places are reserved for the traditional religious believer.

Proper funeral rites have to be performed for the dead. These serve as ways of showing the last respect for the departed. It is also a preparation for the spirit of the dead to be accepted into the other world of *Tsiefe*. The kind of funeral rite also depends on the type of person and type of death as explained earlier. Children, for example, who die at tender ages of, say, less than three years ( in particular those after whom there are no other births) are not to be mourned or given elaborate funeral rites, if any. Like in some other societies<sup>79</sup>, parents and others must dress in white and behave as if they do not care about the death. Should these children see that their early death is not felt in the family, they would then not think of coming back to life for a rebirth and probably for a repeated death of that nature. Ancestors are given befitting burial and funeral rites. To neglect funeral rites is to "punish" or to make the dead not to settle peacefully among the departed at *Tsiefe*. This will not augur well for the living since they will also not have their peace. The dead will torment them in various ways to demand, as it were, their proper settlement. The observation made by Margaret Field about the Ga aptly applies to the Ewe-dome situation when she writes

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<sup>79</sup> These beliefs and practices are found also among various other Ghanain societies

Margaret Field about the Ga aptly applies to the Ewe-dome situation when she writes that “a life time of debt is preferable to an offended dead relative”.<sup>80</sup> On account of these beliefs, people would do everything possible to give a fitting burial to their dead relatives.

#### 2.5.6. *Communicating With The Dead*

The dead do not completely cut off their relationships with the living. The kind of relationship that exists between the living and the dead depends on the category in which the dead is found. The ancestors in particular, are believed to continue being concerned with the affairs of the kin-group they have left behind. As spirit beings, the dead are believed to possess more power than the living. They can shower blessings upon the living while they also punish those who misbehave, for example, those who refuse to share with others the wealth that is left behind by the deceased. There was an instance of a dead person who had meted out a terrible punishment upon the living daughter, at the time of this research. The daughter of a deceased woman was said to have hidden some of the property of her dead mother. The tradition in Ewe-dome is that every piece of property of a deceased must be declared to the knowledge of every member of the kin-group. The deceased in this case, felt disgraced by the daughter hiding some of the acquired property of the deceased and, therefore, not making others to know of her hard work in life. The items are mostly jewellery and clothing. The daughter is now insane. Physicians and psychiatrists have explained her condition with long scientific terms of modern medicine. To many in the area, however, as this researcher was told, the woman is suffering from the wrath of her deceased mother<sup>81</sup>. This is typical of the belief that the departed are primarily concerned with morality among their kin-group.

As a means of remembering the ancestors, and to call upon them to join in activities of the living, drinks are offered to them in the form of libation - ahafofodanyi. Palm-wine is the most common drink in the area and this is usually used. In these days, however, the ancestors seem to prefer the more expensive

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<sup>80</sup> Field Margaret, *Religion and Medicine of The Ga People*, London, Oxford University Press, 1937, p 20

<sup>81</sup> For confidentiality, the names of the woman and the town of the incident are withheld.

commercial alcoholic drinks to the palm-wine. It is interesting to know that in his studies among the Anlo-Ewe on ceremonies involving the ancestors - which are similar to those of the Ewe-dome - Gaba came out with the finding that some ancestors refused to receive the gift of a bottle of locally distilled gin from a man of means and instead demanded "Gordon's Dry Gin".<sup>82</sup> The ancestors seem to be aware of whatever is happening in contemporary society and, therefore, the new brands of drinks that are produced. They would, therefore, like to be treated accordingly. Many, therefore, in these days, use such drinks as Schnapps and Gin to make the libation.

To make libation, the palm-wine is usually put in a calabash (or glass if another type of drink) and drops of it are poured on the ground with the accompaniment of appropriate forms of words. This can be made by either individuals in their homes or other places of their own choice; or while in a group on occasions that demand the invitation of the ancestors, for example, during rites of passage. A typical libation prayer in Ewe-dome is as follows :

Eeee, miey▷ mi lo, Eeee, miey▷ mi lo, Eeee, miey▷ mi lo

Mawu dzifo ▷ miey▷ wo

Anyigba ▷ miey▷ wo

.....tr▷wo petee miey▷ mi.....

T▷gbuiwo miva

Vi menya et▷wo kata ηk▷ ay▷ o lo!

Oo, eyi miy▷ mia, mimey▷ mi de v▷ dzi o.

Agbe dzi ko miy▷ mi do

Egbe nkekea dzia

Mile aza..... dum

Eye wots▷ aha Schnapp tukpa deka nam be mats▷ na nyanya mi

Miebia fafa na duk▷a, agbedidi, ga ne va, dzidz▷ nen▷ afewo me.

Ameyiwo di be yeawoan▷ anyi yewo n▷viwo man▷e oa,

Mikp▷ wogb▷ kaba,

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<sup>82</sup> Gaba C. R., "Anlo Traditional Religion : A Study of the Anlo Traditional Believer's Conception of and Communion with the 'Holy'", p 130



Agbe neva, ɲɔgbeyi neva.

Kuse, Kuse, Kuse.

Literally, the prayer may be translated thus:

Eeee, We call upon you, Eeee, we call upon you, Eeee, we call upon you.

The God of the sky we call upon you;

One of the earth, we call upon you.

The gods.....(names)....,we call upon you.

Ancestors we call upon you.

A child does not know all the names of his ancestors;

Oo, our call on you today is not for anything bad;

Today, we are celebrating.....(name of occasion with special emphases).....

And they have given me a bottle of Schnapps to inform you.

Let there be peace, let there be long life, money, and happiness in homes.

Those who would live but would not let others live, we ask you to see to them.

Let there be life, Let there be prosperity

Peace, Peace, Peace.<sup>83</sup>

Some of the drink is dropped on the ground after almost every sentence. Generally, the prayer, if it is said at a ceremony of, say, outdooring and naming of a child, is directed to Mawu and the ancestors, or simply to the ancestors. Libation prayers that are made on other occasions like agricultural festivals, state functions and at difficult arbitration sessions are directed not only to Mawu and the ancestors, but also to the *trɔwo* (gods). One should take note, however, that one is not saying here that libation prayers in Ewe-dome can be put into straight jacket forms of what should be said and to whom, at different occasions, for, I was also told that names of

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<sup>83</sup>This libation prayer was witnessed and recorded by me on the 28th December, 1996; at a time when the newly installed *Tsiame* (chief's spokesman) of the chief of Vane-Avetime was being introduced to all the chiefs and their spokesmen in the Avetime traditional area. The prayer was said in Avetime language with special emphases on the occasion. This writer has made a literal translation of it into Ewe language - for a wider readership. It should be noted also that the Avetime language is not a written language and would, therefore, be difficult for even the indigenes to read it when it is presented in a written form.



spirit beings that are mentioned may not be limited to particular occasions.<sup>84</sup> It is only the usual features that we are describing here.

Apart from libation, food is left on the floor or ground during meal times in traditional Ewe-dome homes, for the ancestors to eat as the living also eat. On special occasions, as for instance during rites of passage such as funeral rites and sometimes, I was told<sup>85</sup>, at the rite of initiation into womanhood, special dishes are made and put at appropriate places for the ancestors. The ancestors may not be seen physically eating these meals but the belief is that the meals must be shared with them, a symbolic way of having a continuous relationship with them, the kind they were used to while living on earth. If I may use the words of Ela, which fit into the Ewe-dome situation, it is a way of “reliving a kinship relationship with them”<sup>86</sup>.

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<sup>84</sup> Tsiami Atsu Gansu (Vane; 29th December, 1997; No. 28 in Bibliography) and Tsiami Kwesi Amedzoku (Tsito; 3rd February, 1997; op cit.), for example, held the view that names of *trɔwo* are not mentioned in libation prayers at outdoorings and naming ceremonies, while Tsiami Dzade-Ahiaglo of Ho said that names of spirit powers that are called in outdoorings and naming libation prayer may not be limited to the ancestors; 16th February, 1997; No. 25 in Bibliography.

<sup>85</sup> I did not see this particular practice at any of the places that I visited during the rite of initiation into womanhood. I was, however, told by some people that the practice is performed by some during this period. Refer, for example, to my interview with Pastor Benoni Akoto, presented verbatim at p 117.

<sup>86</sup> Ela Jean-Marc, *My Faith As An African* (Translated from the French by John Pairman Brown and Susan Perry), Maryknoll, Orbis Books, 1988, P 19

## Chapter 3

### A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE EVANGELICAL PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH IN EWE-DOME

In looking at the impact of the Church on the traditional rites of Outdooring, Naming and Initiation into womanhood, I have chosen to focus on one Church, the Evangelical Presbyterian Church, the dominant Church in the Ewe-dome area. I am aware of the “disturbing” schism in this Church, an event that took place in 1991; and about which reconciliation talks are going on even at the time of writing this thesis. The break has led to two Evangelical Presbyterian Churches. One is called “Evangelical Presbyterian Church, Ghana”, and the other is “Evangelical Presbyterian Church of Ghana” - the distinguishing marks in the names are “,” and “of”. I shall be using the term *the Church* whenever I am referring to the two Churches. I shall then specify which of the two Churches I am referring to, at appropriate points, whenever an issue is related to only one of them. Christians are in the majority in the area. There are also a few Muslims and few Traditional Religious believers.

#### *3.1. The Coming Of Christianity To Ewe land*

##### *3.1.1. Developments Before The Twentieth Century*

Missionary activities were started in Ewe land by a Society that was formed in Hamburg in Germany, a society that was later moved to Bremen in 1836. The Mission came to be known as the Bremen Mission. Since Hamburg and Bremen were both located geographically in the northern part of Germany, the Society was also referred to as the North German Mission Society (Norddeutsche Missionsgesellschaft).<sup>88</sup> The Bremen Mission was one of several that were established in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries with the object of sending

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<sup>88</sup> Wiegrabe Paul, *Ewe Kristo Hame Nutinya 1847 - 1936*, St. Louis, n.d., The Board of International Missions, p 1

missionaries to various lands to spread the Gospel. Some of the other Societies are the Baptist Missionary Society (1792), London Missionary Society (1795), Church Missionary Society (1799), American Board (1810), the Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society (1813), and the Basel Missionary Society (1815).

The Bremen Mission was late in coming to West Africa since West Africa was not one of its original targets of evangelization. The original targets were New Zealand and India. In 1847, the Mission decided to extend its activities to the West Coast of Africa and on the 17th of March, 1847, four missionaries left Germany for the West African Coast. They were Lorenz Wolf (26 years), Jens Graff (32 years), Luer Bultmann (28 years) and Karl Flato (25 years).<sup>89</sup>

After a difficult voyage of 50 days, the missionaries landed at Cape Coast in the Gold Coast (now Ghana) on the 5th of May, 1847<sup>90</sup>. They were welcomed to Cape Coast by the Wesleyan missionaries who were already on the coast. The Wesleyan missionaries advised that two of the newly arrived missionaries should go further afield and survey the land to find a suitable place to work. Thus Wolf and Bultmann went ahead till they reached Gabon. A few days after their arrival in Gabon, Bultmann died of malaria fever<sup>91</sup>. Wolf was also not allowed to remain in the country by the French Government which controlled Gabon at the time.<sup>92</sup> It was said that "The Government was jealous of the influence of the missionaries, and opposed them, less perhaps as Protestants than as disseminators of Anglo-Saxon influence and culture".<sup>93</sup>

On his return to Cape Coast, Wolf was most disappointed to hear that back at Cape Coast, Flato also had died.<sup>94</sup> The two remaining missionaries, Wolf and Graff, though disappointed, moved to Christiansborg Castle in Accra to seek counsel with the Basel Missionaries, who were already there. The Basel Missionaries advised them to turn to Ewe land where there were no missionaries. At the Christiansborg Castle,

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<sup>89</sup> Wiegrabe Paul, p 1; Also, Agbeti John K., *Evangelical Presbyterian Church, Ghana, 1847 - 1992*, Accra, Manifold Tutorial College Pubs, 1990, p 1

<sup>90</sup> Agbeti J. K., p 3.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid., p 3 - 4.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid.

<sup>93</sup> Du Plessis J., *The Evangelisation of Pagan Africa: A History of Christian Missions To The Pagan Tribes of Central Africa*, Cape Town & Johannesburg, J. C. Juta & co Ltd, 1929, p 175

<sup>94</sup> Agbeti, p 4.

they met also a son of the chief of Peki (an area in Ewe land) called Nyangamagu, who was by then attending a school in Christiansborg Castle. Nyangamagu offered to take the missionaries to his father's kingdom. Wolf and Nyangamagu arrived in Peki on the 14th of November, 1847, leaving Graff in Christiansborg. They were warmly welcomed by the chief, Tutu Togbe Kwadzo Dei V and his people.<sup>95</sup>

Work was started in earnest when Wolf, in the evening of the same day, a Sunday, preached a Sermon that was based on Ps 22: 22 "I will tell of thy name to my brethren; in the midst of the congregation I will praise thee....".<sup>96</sup> He earlier told the people that he had come not for trade nor for war.

I am not going to buy slaves nor do I have in mind to rob people of their land. I came a long way from a country where there are only white people. I wish to show you the source of happiness: the true God. I wish to proclaim Him from whom come all good gifts and who sent His Son into this world of ours.<sup>97</sup>

That then marked the beginning of the missionary work in Ewe land. The welcome encouraged Wolf to send for Graff, only to be informed about the death of Graff also. It was a difficult time but with the co-operation of the indigenes, a Mission house was completed for Wolf by the 14th of January, 1848<sup>98</sup>. The establishment of a school (opened on 8th February, 1848) was necessitated by the difficulty Wolf was encountering in communicating with the people. He recorded in his diary that:

During my first months I had an interpreter. But his way of life was so immoral that I had to be ashamed of him; besides, his interpretation was so bad that it was of very little use. He had once to tell the king: 'In my country, there is no polygamy' but instead he interpreted my words to mean that the king was to give me one of his wives.<sup>99</sup>

There is no record of the kind of immoral life that the interpreter was said to have led. Wolf felt that children could more easily learn the "whiteman's" language and help to interpret it more accurately to the elderly.

While trying to overcome the problem of language, Wolf had other setbacks. For example, the *trɔnuawo*, the traditional religious priests, became hostile to the

<sup>95</sup> Agbeti John K., *Evangelical Presbyterian Church*, p 4

<sup>96</sup> Wiegrabe Paul, *Ewe Kristo Hame Nutinya*, p 5

<sup>97</sup> Agbeti John K., p 7

<sup>98</sup> Ibid. p 9

<sup>99</sup> Ibid.

“new Religion”. Wolf did not only preach the good news about which he came. He healed people of their ailments. It is reported that he at one time “cured the chief Tim Klu of Wudome of a chronic ulcer”.<sup>100</sup> Such treatments naturally won him admiration and respect. Wolf has noted: “It was now believed that I could perform miracles and that there was magic in my medicine”.<sup>101</sup> The people were impressed by the “power” of the missionaries. The traditional religious healers and priests saw the activities of Wolf as a threat to their own indigenous healing systems. This was because they would lose the confidence of the people in their own healing powers as well as the monetary gains that they were having from the healing.

It was reported also that the priests did not only attempt preventing Wolf from healing but that they also blamed Tɔgbe Tutu for accommodating the missionary. Worst of all, a great drought came in 1848 and the priests blamed it on the presence of the “whiteman” and his God.<sup>102</sup> Other people were, however, very sympathetic to Wolf. When he became seriously ill, it was reported, they attributed the illness to “the anger of the guardian spirits; and unknown to Wolf, spell was cast at the crossroads and libation poured to save his life”. Tɔgbe Tutu himself, the report continues, “watched that nothing happened contrary to the priest of the whiteman’s God, for he held a good opinion of this God”.<sup>103</sup>

In spite of difficulties, the work progressed steadily and the hands of Wolf became strengthened by the arrival of two new missionaries, Groth and Quinius, in 1849. Wolf’s fiancée, Miss Koroline Deist, also arrived in 1850. This happy moment was, however, short-lived as Wolf became sick and had to return to Germany in 1851. He died soon after the arrival of the ship in Hamburg.<sup>104</sup>

Two more missionaries (Wilhelm Dauble and Johannes Menge) had to take up the mantle, and, in the company of Quinius and his wife, they arrived in Christiansborg in the same year, on the 23rd of December, 1851, and in Peki in January, 1852.<sup>105</sup>

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<sup>100</sup> Ibid.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid., p 10

<sup>102</sup> Ansre Gilbert, (ed.), *The Evangelical Presbyterian Church: 150 Years of Evangelization and Development 1847 - 1997*, Ho, Evangelical Presbyterian Church, 1997, p 24

<sup>103</sup> Ibid.

<sup>104</sup> Wiegrabe Paul, *Ewe Kristo Hame Nutinya*, p 6

<sup>105</sup> Agbeti John K., *The Evangelical Presbyterian Church*, p 12

The weather and mosquitoes had terrible effects on the missionaries and on the 6th of March, 1852, Quinus' wife had a son who was still-born.<sup>106</sup> Menge also died not long after that. Even though new hands in the persons of Plessing and Brutschin were added later, the work at Peki had to be abandoned as Quinius, his wife and Dauble became sick. At the same time, tribal wars between the Pekis and Akwamus also increased.<sup>107</sup>

In 1853, Dauble and Plessing moved to Keta, leaving Brutschin, who was sick, in Accra with the hope of opening a new station. The work did not progress as speedily as the missionaries had wished. The traditional priests gave them anxious moments. The priests of the traditional *Yewe* cult, for example, mostly of the southern Ewe, were reported to have answered a missionary call to follow Jesus that "If the *tro Nyigbla* was seen as nothing by the missionaries, then Yesu was also nothing" - before them, the traditional priests. That, it was only *Nyigbla* that was worth worshipping and they were also, therefore, imploring the missionaries to worship *Nyigbla*.<sup>108</sup>

By 1854, the first seven years of missionary activities witnessed only seven converts along with seven missionary graves.<sup>109</sup> Seeing the need for translating the Bible into the Ewe language - for a more effective communication - the Rev. Benhard Schlegel came down from Germany in March 1854. He studied the Ewe language and wrote his *Key to the Ewe Language*.<sup>110</sup> By 1877, the whole New Testament had been translated and published.

The first formal school in Keta was opened on 22nd February, 1855, by Schauffer, a new addition to the missionary number. All the pupils in this school were children of immigrants, that is, they came from places outside Keta; for, it was reported, even though the missionaries were not engaged in slave trade as they had promised, the people were still afraid that their children might become slaves to the missionaries if they were sent to their schools.<sup>111</sup> From Keta, the missionaries re-

<sup>106</sup> Ansre Gilbert, *Evangelical Presbyterian Church*, p 26

<sup>107</sup> Wiegrabe Paul, *Ewe Kristo Hame Nutinya*, p 8

<sup>108</sup> Ibid., pp 10 - 11

<sup>109</sup> Agbeti John K., *Evangelical Presbyterian Church*, p 17

<sup>110</sup> Wiegrabe Paul, p 25.

<sup>111</sup> Ansre Gilbert, p 29.





extended the work to Peki. More stations were also opened as follows: Adaklu Waya (1856), Anyako (1857), Gbi-Wegbe (1859), Ho (1859).

In 1862, Franz Michael Zahn of Germany became the mission inspector in Bremen and brought many changes in the way the missionary task was undertaken. The first set of detailed guidelines, referred to as "Zahn's constitution of 1876", were formulated under his leadership. We shall write more about these later.

To enhance effective missionary work, a local seminary for the training of catechists was opened in Ho in 1864. This was later transferred to Anyako in 1869, and again moved to Keta by 1883. Anyako had to be abandoned because of the strong opposition from the traditional priests. Let me add here that wives of the missionaries and other females were also greatly involved in the evangelistic work. They helped the indigenous girls and women with such efforts as knitting, sewing, cookery, child-care and other forms of house-craft - according to European standards. Well-organized schools were opened for the girls/women, for example, in Keta in 1883 and one in 1893 in Ho. The teachers include Knusli and Hedwig Rohns.<sup>112</sup>

The missionaries were also helped by many indigenes. The missionary work would, in fact, have been a total failure, had they not been helped by the indigenes. Notable among the local people was John Wright, from Teshi in Accra, who did very good work in interpreting sermons into the Ewe language. Others include Rudolf Mallet - a ransomed slave from Peki who in 1882 became the first local person to be ordained - Noa Yawo, Stephen Tenu Kwami, William Lemgo and Paulo Ntutitse. The translation of the Bible into Ewe was also done by Dauble and Spieth, assisted by five local people: Andreas Aku, Adzaklo, Samuel Quist, Yosef Tosu and Kudese.<sup>113</sup>

The Bremen Mission celebrated the Golden Jubilee of its work in Ewe land on the 19th of November, 1897, and by this time membership in the Church had risen to 2,000. There were also 900 school pupils at that time.<sup>114</sup>

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<sup>112</sup> Wiegrabe Paul, *Ewe Kristo Hame Nutinya*, p 42

<sup>113</sup> Mamattah Charles M. K., *The Ewes of West Africa*, p 283; Also, Ansre Gilbert, *Evangelical Presbyterian Church*, p 52

<sup>114</sup> Wiegrabe Paul, p57



### 3.1.2. *The Mission in the Twentieth Century*

Missionary work in Ewe land progressed steadily. In 1901, inspector Zahn died and August Wilhem Scriber took up the directorship of the mission. In 1904, another mission station was opened at Akpafu Todzi, a mission that played an important role in opening up the Buem area. We should note that the Basel missionaries had already started work in Buem and Nkonya areas, a work that was later disrupted by inter-tribal wars. Missionary work by the German Mission was also going on in the German Territory of Togoland.

#### 3.1.2.1. *Mission In The First World War*

The onset of the First World War in 1914 disrupted missionary activities at the time. The world was at war, with Germany and the allied forces (that included Britain and France as leading actors) on opposing sides. As a result of the defeat of Germany, Togoland (a former German Colony), was divided into British and French mandated territories. This was done under the now defunct League of Nations. With a lot of tension, suspicion and mistrust all over the world, both Britain and France found it expedient to expel the Germans working in their territories - even the missionaries. With the exception of Ernst Burgi and his wife (who were Swiss nationals), all the missionaries had to leave for home by 1917/1918.<sup>115</sup> By 1920, the border line was finally drawn and stations such as Ho, Akpafu, Amedzɔfe and Kpandu were in the British territory while Agu, Lome, Kpalime and Atakpame stations were in the French territory<sup>116</sup>. Rev. Ernst Burgi was by then in Lome, on the French side of Togo.

All hope for missionary activity was, however, not lost since the British Government did not intend to do away with the work of mission altogether. For this reason, the Colonial Office in London made a request to the United Free Church of Scotland (U. F. C.) to send down missionaries that would continue with the work of the German missionaries in the Gold Coast and British Togoland. The U. F. C.

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<sup>115</sup> Wiegrabe Paul, *Ewe Kristo Hame* p 49.

<sup>116</sup> Ansre Gilbert, *Evangelical Presbyterian Church*, p 57.

accepted the challenge despite financial and other difficulties. Rev. A. W. Wilkie, who was by then secretary of the United Free Church of Scotland Missionary Council in Calabar, then transferred to the Mission in the Gold Coast in February, 1918.<sup>117</sup> The French mandated zone in Togo was then taken over by the Paris Mission.<sup>118</sup>

Grau reported that the Scottish missionaries did not find the beginning of their work with the Ewe people easy. The congregations felt that the Scottish Mission had come to usurp the roles of the Bremen missionaries with whom they were accustomed and for whom there was much sympathy.<sup>119</sup> Communication was another problem since most of the Scottish missionaries could not speak the Ewe language like their German counterparts. Furthermore, having been invited by the British Government and, therefore, maintaining close contact with high officials, or simply, holding a favoured position with the British Government, the Scottish Mission was suspected of being an arm of the British Government.<sup>120</sup>

The Scottish Mission in the Gold Coast, however, furthered an administrative structure that encouraged the taking up of leadership roles in the Church by the indigenous people (under its tutelage). A local minister, Andreas Aku became the leader (moderator) of the Ewe Christians in the Gold Coast and Togo in 1922, a time when the Church came to be known as the Ewe Kristo Hame (Ewe Christian Church). This was decided on at the first Synod held at Kpalime in Togo, from the 19th to the 22nd May, 1922. For effective administrative work the Rev. Robert Kwame was also elected secretary (synod clerk) to the Gold Coast and British Togoland side while Rev. Robert Baeta became the secretary to the French side of the Church. There were 166 delegates to the synod of which 14 were local ministers, 14 catechists, 45 teachers, 58 elders and 35 other lay persons.<sup>121</sup> It was reported that "The French administration forbade the attendance of any European, a restriction which, as it turned out, led to a clear demonstration of the resourcefulness of the

<sup>117</sup> Gyang-Duah Charles, "The Scottish Mission Factor in the Development of The Presbyterian Church of Ghana": Ph.D. Thesis, CSCNWW, University of Edinburgh, 1996, p 4 - 5

<sup>118</sup> Agbeti John K., *Evangelical Presbyterian Church*, p 21.

<sup>119</sup> Grau Eugene Emil, "The Evangelical Presbyterian Church (Ghana and Togo) 1914 - 1946; A Study in European Mission Relations affecting the Beginning of an Indigenous Church", Ph.D. Thesis, Faculty of the Hartford Seminary Foundation, Peki, 1964, p 231,

<sup>120</sup> Ibid.

<sup>121</sup> Ansre Gilbert, *Evangelical Presbyterian Church*, p 61.

young Church's leaders"<sup>122</sup>. The most important decision that was reached at the meeting had to do with the unity of the Ewe Church. It was felt that despite the political partitioning of Africa by the colonialists - which affected the Church as it was divided into French-Togo and English-Gold Coast Churches - the division should not be allowed to affect the unity of the Ewe Church.

The Church celebrated also, in this same year (1922), the 75th anniversary of Bremen work in Ewe land.

### 3.1.2.2. *From "Ewe Christian Church" to "Ewe Presbyterian Church"*

The horizon became further brightened when the German missionaries, in 1923, were allowed by the British to return to the British mandated territory. Three missionaries, including Paul Wiegrabe, were subsequently sent down from Germany in 1923. They were given a rousing welcome. They worked hand-in-hand with the Scottish Mission until 1926 when the Scottish Mission suspended work with the Ewe Church. In 1923, the Church also decided to elect a second moderator to help in the administration of the Church. Rev. Bensah was elected the moderator for the Ewe Church in the Gold Coast while Rev. Aku continued with his moderatorship this time for the Ewe Church in Togo only.

The missionaries were happy with the progress of the Church, even in the midst of the difficulties. The progress, they felt, was due to a large extent, to the efforts of the local ministers and elders. At a joint synod meeting that was held from the 6th to the 7th of October, 1926, the Church adopted the word "Presbyterian" in place of "Christian" and it, therefore, became known as the "Ewe Presbyterian Church"<sup>123</sup>. The adoption of the term "Presbyterian" was to ensure that the Church is governed primarily by the elders, usually chosen by the congregation. The Presbyterian concept of Church government could also be traced to the Biblical concept of Church organization - the Church being governed or directed by elders - as evidenced, for example, in Acts 15.

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<sup>122</sup> Ibid.

<sup>123</sup> Ansre Gilbert, *Evangelical Presbyterian Church*, p 23.

In 1930, a Seminary was opened in Ho, with Rev. Paul Wiegrabe as the first principal.

In 1933, Mrs. Luise Funkey and Rev. & Mrs R. S. Kwami founded the Church's women's Bible class Movement at Amedzofe.<sup>124</sup> By 1935, there were 48,500 Christians - for both British-Togo and Gold Coast - and 10,200 school pupils. There were also six missionary ministers and as many as 22 local ministers; while teachers and evangelists numbered 400.<sup>125</sup>

### 3.1.2.3. *The Church in the Second World War*

The movement of the clock of evangelization was once more shaken with the onset of the 2nd World War in 1939. The North German missionaries were once more deported by the British Government (as it was the case in the 1st World War). There was, thus, a recall of the Scottish missionaries, to continue with the superintendency of the Church. Mr. F. D. Harker, one of the new Scottish missionaries, was then made the first inspector of schools.

In 1946, the first Teachers' Training College in British Togoland was established at Amedzofe and Rev. W. M. Beveridge (a Scot) was made the first principal. The Scottish Mission expressed its inability to continue with personnel or funds. The Ewe Presbyterian Church, thus, turned to America for help. The request was made through the International Missionary Council to the Board of International Mission of the Evangelical and Reformed Church, now known as the United Church of Christ, USA. Through the interim effort of the Scottish Mission, the colonial Government granted the permission for the American Mission to work in the Gold Coast. The American Mission's first missionary was Rev. Eugene Grau.<sup>126</sup> It is interesting to note that Rev. Grau, of the Evangelical and Reformed Church of America, was born in Germany (in 1917) by German parents and was taken to America in 1924. He, thus, had a good knowledge of the German language and even though he lived in America, he could be described as one who could follow German

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<sup>124</sup> *Evangelical Presbyterian Church, Ghana Calendar: Lectionary & Records*, Ho, E. P. Church Headquarters, 1997, p 2.

<sup>125</sup> Ansre Gilbert, *Evangelical Presbyterian Church*, p 92.

<sup>126</sup> Agbeti J. K., *Evangelical Presbyterian Church*, p 56.

tradition. Grau served the Ewe Presbyterian Church in various fields. For example, he was the first principal of the Seminary at Peki, and ended his service in the Ewe Presbyterian Church as a principal of Trinity College, Legon.<sup>127</sup>

#### 3.1.2.4. From “Ewe Presbyterian Church” to “Evangelical Presbyterian Church”

The Church continued to make a steady progress and by 1954, there was a need once more to change its name, this time from “Ewe Presbyterian” to “Evangelical Presbyterian” Church. The change in name came as a result of two factors. 1) Political agitation by some Ewes for unification of Ewes in Togo and the Gold Coast and 2) To make the Church more universal in nature.

1) *Political Agitation*: There arose in the 1950s some political movements that were agitating for “Ewe Unification”, that is, to bring together under one political unit, the two sections of the British mandated territory of Togo (known as the Trans Volta Togoland) and that of the French mandated territory of Togoland. It was felt that the artificial boundary that was drawn between the British territory and that of the French was “a stumbling block in the way both of internal trade and commerce, cultural, social and religious contact. There was a lack of harmony in administrative methods”.<sup>128</sup> The movements, for example, the “The Ablorde Group” (“Freedom Group”) were, however, counteracted by other activities of a political body in the Gold Coast, the “C. P. P.” (“Conventions Peoples Party”). This party wanted independence from colonial rule, for the Gold Coast - which could include the British Togoland. The C. P. P. found the demands of the “Ewe Unification Movements” to be inimical to its wishes, that is, they were going to delay the expectations of the C. P. P. for “self-government now”. The issues somehow became politicized in the Church also since some of the leaders in the Church at the time, for example, the synod clerk, Rev. Ametowobla, was a pro-Ablorde - for the Ewe Unification. Buem members of the Church, many of whom in the first place were non-Ewe speaking, became uncomfortable with the trend of events and advocated a break with the

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<sup>127</sup> Trinity College is a place where pastors are trained for the Church. It was at the time established jointly by the Presbyterian Church of the Gold Coast, The Evangelical Presbyterian Church, and The Methodist Church.

<sup>128</sup> Amenumey D. E. K., *The Ewe Unification Movement*, p 48.

Church. They actually formed another Church - the Presbyterian Evangelical Church (P. E. C.). In order to bring back the Buem into the mother Church, it was felt that the Church ought to be de-ethnicized.<sup>129</sup>

2) *To make the Church more universal*: It was also felt that after all, the Great Commission of the Church is to “Go therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit...” (Matt. 28: 19-20). There was, therefore, no point in tagging a Church with a tribal name. The name “Evangelical Presbyterian Church” was, therefore, unanimously adopted (in place of “Ewe Presbyterian Church”) at a synod meeting that was held at Kpedze in the Gold Coast in 1954. The term “Evangelical” which lays emphasis on preaching the Word to all and living by it, was found to be more meaningful to the Christian life and more in consonance with scripture.<sup>130</sup>

The Evangelical Presbyterian Church grew in membership and its name became known both in and outside the country. The missionary work was not concerned only with the spiritual life of the people. A lot of efforts were also put in to provide the people with material needs. Hospitals were built to cater for the health needs of the people, for example, the hospitals of Worawora and Adidome. There was also a development of static and mobile clinics to spread health care more widely among the people. Efforts were also made in the area of agriculture. For example, two fishing schools were established at Kpandu and Tokor to equip the youth with modern fishing techniques. Various staff development projects were also undertaken alongside the various schools that were built.

### 3.2. *Schisms In The Church*

The Evangelical Presbyterian Church, (hereafter to be known as E. P. Church), like some other Churches in the history of the Church Universal, had some setbacks in the history of its growth. There were conflicts which led to schisms, the greatest of which occurred in 1991. Since these schisms do not revolve around the

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<sup>129</sup> Atakoro Macwilson, “The Emergence and Development of The Constitution of The Evangelical Presbyterian Church and its Contribution to the Schism of 1991”, M. A. Thesis, The Dept. For The Study of Religions, University of Ghana, 1995, p18

<sup>130</sup> Ibid.



central issues of this dissertation, we are simply providing a brief sketch of these disturbing events. Other details could be found in various other works on that subject.<sup>131</sup>

The first schism in the Evangelical Presbyterian Church occurred in 1949, and was led by Mawufeame Wovenu Nutɔnutsi of Tadzewu. Wovenu was a catechist in the Evangelical Presbyterian Church and started a prayer group in 1939. He then encouraged adoption of food taboos. As he himself put it, "Our food taboos are those stated in the Old Testament".<sup>132</sup> It is also said that he does not see anything wrong with performing sacrifices with animals and birds. These, many members of the Church found unacceptable in view of the sacrificial life and death of Jesus Christ, which is seen as fulfilling the Old Testament sacrifices. Wovenu does not also find anything wrong with polygamy, a practice that the Church was trying to discourage. To him "Polygamy is allowed, according to the scriptures but not loose living in sexual matters".<sup>133</sup> Attempts to bring Mawufeame Wovenu back to the beliefs and practices of the Church failed and by 1949, Wovenu had decided to break off with the Church and found what is now known as the "Apostolic Revelation Society" - "*Apostolowo fe Dedefia Habobo*", with its headquarters at Tadzewu.

A second break occurred in 1960. Frank Kwadzo Doh, a local preacher, started a prayer and healing session at Etodome. The group was initially tolerated by the Church. With time, however, the group's activities were found not to be consonant with the E. P. tradition. The leader, for instance, was said to have had a vision in which no footwear of any kind was to be taken into a house of prayer. According to *nunola* (leader) Doh, "This is God's law, made plain without any possibility of useful controversy over it, by the biblical example of Moses and the burning bush". No woman in her monthly period was also allowed to enter the house of prayer. There was also praying aloud, the use of oil and salted holy water in healing activities, and the practice of exorcism.<sup>134</sup> The activities were found not to conform to the Church's tradition. A committee was set up, chaired by Rev. Abutiate,

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<sup>131</sup> For example, refer to: Atakoro Macwilson, Ibid.; Baeta C. R., *Prophetism In Ghana: A Study of Some "Spiritual Churches"*, Liverpool and London, SCM Press Ltd, 1962.

<sup>132</sup> Baeta C. R., *Prophetism In Ghana* p 82

<sup>133</sup> Ibid.

<sup>134</sup> Ibid., 98 - 99

to investigate and counsel *nunola* Doh on these practices. *Nunola* Doh could not give up the practices and this eventually led to the founding of what has come to be known as the White Cross Society at Etodome.

Another schism occurred in 1961, and evolved into a Church that is now known as the Lord's Pentecostal Church - also known as "Agbelengor", literally meaning, "There is life ahead". Samuel Amedzro was miraculously healed by one Prophet Borkuma, of a prayer and healing centre at Tekrom. He (Amedzro) was then said to have had a vision in which God gave him the name John, and asked him to set up a healing centre. Amedzro did not intend to break away from Peki-Blengo E. P. Church, but, somehow, the ecstatic occurrences which took place at the centre were found unacceptable in the Church. Efforts made by the Peki District of the E. P. Church to stop the activities proved unsuccessful and Amedzro, with some followers, left the E. P. Church in Peki to form the Lord's Pentecostal Church.<sup>135</sup>

A further schism occurred in 1964 out of a leadership crisis. Samuel Ntumi Atiega was the catechist of the Accra New Town E. P. Church. He was seen by other members of the Church as one who was leading "a one-man show", that is, he was seen to be administering the Church single-handedly<sup>136</sup>. Attempts to resolve the issue and involve others in the administration were said not to yield the desired results. Atiega then decided to break from the Church and found the "Christ Evangelical Mission", with its headquarters at Kotobabi in Accra.

The above schisms, one may say, were marginal in terms of members, when compared with the latest one that occurred in 1991, and about which reconciliation talks are still going on. Factors that led to this 1991 break are more complex in nature than those of the earlier ones. The group that is now known as the "E. P. Church of Ghana", with quite a sizeable membership, to a large extent, started through a Bible Study and Prayer Fellowship that first emerged around 1975. The fellowship, even though was officially endorsed in the E. P. Church, was later found to be "too charismatic" in nature. By the term "charismatic" (and perhaps as in the earlier

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<sup>135</sup> For further reading on this schism, refer to Meyer Birgit, "Translating the Devil: An African Appropriation of Pietist Protestantism - The case of the Peki-Ewe in southeastern Ghana, 1847 - 1992", Ph.D. Thesis, University of Amsterdam, 1995, pp 184 - 188.

<sup>136</sup> Atakoro Mcwilson, "The Emergence and Development of the The Constitution of the E. P. Church", pp 158 - 159.

cases), one is referring to various practices and usages associated with the fellowship. For instance, speaking in tongues, ecstasy in prayer and worship, spiritual healing and exorcism, interruption of sermons with expressions of “Hallelujah”, “Praise the Lord”, and prophesying in Church services. For such practices and expressions, the Fellowship came under great criticism by some in the Church. These include some Church leaders.

Coupled with the above were constitutional problems in the Church; in particular were those that had to do with the tenure of the moderatorship and that of the synod clerk. The appointment of Rt. Rev. Dzobo to a third term of office as moderator sparked off resentment in some members of the Church. Rev. Dzobo had earlier on introduced a new theological approach into the Church, the “*Meleagbe Theology*”; the introduction of which was found to be done “stealthily”, that is, without the consent of Synod or other members of the Church. The “*Meleagbe Theology*” is seen by Rev. Dzobo as an attempt “to interpret the Gospel in traditional moulds”. It has as its symbols (1) a cross with a snake encircling the intersecting section of upright and cross bar. The snake has its tail in the mouth and (2) A cross with a Ghanaian symbol “Gye Nyame” (an Akan expression meaning “Except God”) embossed on it. The first symbol (the cross with the snake), among some other things, made many people wary and it became a source of controversy among many in the Church. According to Rev. Dzobo, the symbol with the snake is “reminiscent of rejuvenation of life”.<sup>137</sup> To some in the Church, that very symbol “is a rejuvenation symbol, especially among the Fon of Dahomey”<sup>138</sup> and, some, therefore, felt that it was an introduction into the Church of a symbol that stands for the snake cult in Dahomey. The introduction of the “new theology” in the Church was found to be “an unwarranted adulation of the past”<sup>139</sup> - an introduction of certain pre-Christian ideas into the Church.

Another issue has to do with what came to be known as the “Policy and “Guidelines Committee”, a Committee that was regarded as an undemocratic

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<sup>137</sup> Dzobo Noah, An unpublished introduction to *Meleagbe Theology*, found in Atakro Macwilson “The Emergence and Development of The Constitution of The Evangelical Presbyterian Church and its contribution to the Schism of 1991”, p 108

<sup>138</sup> Ansre Gilbert, (ed.), *The Evangelical Presbyterian Church*, p 128

<sup>139</sup> Ibid., p 134

establishment that was used to filter out agenda proposals which seemed unacceptable to the Executive.<sup>140</sup>

All the issues came to a head in 1991, causing another break to occur in the E. P. Church. This break may be described as a break into two, of the E. P. Church in Ghana, since both Churches have large membership. One of the Churches is known as the “E. P. Church of Ghana” while the other is called the “E. P. Church, Ghana”. The distinguishing items in the names are the “,” and the “of”.

The E. P. Church of Ghana is more charismatic in nature - being the erstwhile Bible Study and prayer fellowship - while the E. P. Church, Ghana is of the more conservative “mainline” character. Reconciliation talks are, however, going on (although the pace is slow), to bring the two factions together again.

### *3.3. The Church and Traditional Beliefs and Practices*

#### *3.3.1. Missionary Guidelines*

In spite of the achievements and growth in numbers of the E. P. Church(es) in Ghana, there seems to be a perennial conflict between some of the traditional religious-cultural beliefs and practices and some aspects of the understanding current among some of the believers in the Church. These conflicts are of concern to the people as they create various difficulties of conscience within individuals as well as among groups of people in the society. Some of these practices have to do with the traditional rites of birth and initiation into womanhood which are the subject of our study.

The Bremen missionaries, we have noted, were given some guidelines in 1876, referred to as “Zahn’s Constitution of 1876”. The guidelines, in content, were for faith and conduct, as well as directions to the missionaries and all others working in the mission field. Below are some of the matters covered in the policies and guidelines.<sup>141</sup>

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<sup>140</sup> Ibid.

<sup>141</sup> The classification is as found in Grau E., “Missionary Policies as seen in the work of Missions with the Evangelical Presbyterian Church, Ghana” in Baeta C. G., *Christianity in Tropical Africa*, London, Oxford University Press, 1968, pp 64 - 73.

## 1. The Congregation To Serve As A Witness

The first policy has to do with “The congregation serving as a witness”. In this policy, the missionaries were to aim to convert all to the Christian faith. All who had accepted the Christian faith were to be united into integrated congregations. The congregation was believed to be superior to the individual Christian in its power to witness. As soon as there was a small congregation and a school, the members and school children were to accompany the missionaries or African evangelists on preaching tours to neighbouring towns or villages.

## 2. Study of Language and Culture

The missionaries were urged to study the local languages for effective communication. Reliance on interpreters was discouraged. The missionaries were also urged to “learn to know the people among whom they lived; their way of life, beliefs, customs, attitudes and relationships”<sup>142</sup>. They were instructed to show sympathetic appreciation of customary practices but the wrong and obsolete practices and rites, for example, ritual murders, were to be condemned. The missionaries were also told that:

an inconsiderate damning or dismissal of heathenism is no way to win the trust of the heathen and to convince them of the truth of Christianity, but it will rather raise a spirit of stubbornness and obstinacy in holding on to the traditional beliefs, and will shut their hearts to the missionary. Much more useful will it be to find, in the faith and heart of the heathen, points of contact for Christian truth, and from there begin the work of conviction.<sup>143</sup>

The missionaries were not to try to wipe out all customs and replace them with European practice. Christianity was believed in any case to have the power to make customs more gentle and to create a worthy civilization among the people who embrace it.

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<sup>142</sup> Ibid., p 66

<sup>143</sup> Ibid.

### 3. Concern For The Whole Of Life

The third policy has to do with a concern for the whole life. For Christianity to have a full impact on the total life of the people among whom the missionaries lived, certain steps were to be taken:

The missionaries were not to withdraw their converts into closed communities since that was not the policy or intention of the Basel and Bremen Missions. Those who became Christians were to remain with their families and clan. Where Christian settlements were established (as emergency measures only and not as the accepted practice), the civil organization of the Christian town was to be in the hands of the elders. These were to be local people either elected or appointed to head the settlements. Settlers who returned to heathen practices could be sent away immediately from the settlements by the local leaders or leaders so appointed.

Christians were to be assisted and encouraged to be better farmers and traders who were to do "legitimate" trading as opposed to slave trading.

The family was to be the most effective unit for social change, thus Christian homes were to be established. The missionaries were told that since polygamy existed even at the time of Christ and the apostles, monogamy was not to be used as a condition for acceptance into the Church.

Therefore, a man who has several wives must be admitted to baptism and communion; however, all are always to be reminded that monogamy is the true marriage according to God, and that only in this way can the purpose of marriage be reached.<sup>144</sup>

### 4. Attitude Towards Civil Authority and Colonial Power

The missionaries were asked to set good examples to their converts in their attitude towards civil authorities. Chiefs were not to be belittled, despised, resisted or overthrown by the missionaries. The missionaries were also not to set up or acquire colonies. They were also not to oppose colonial governments but to work hand-in-hand with them.

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<sup>144</sup> Baeta C. R., *Christianity in Tropical Africa*, p 68



Furthermore, English was to be used as the lingua franca instead of German. It was the view of Zahn, the inspector, that English would be of greater help to West African citizens than German. This was because English was used more extensively internationally than German. Vernaculars, however, were to be the medium of instruction in the lower classes of the schools. Further, the mission schools were to maintain the character of Christian schools and emphasize Bible teaching.

## 5. Preparing Congregations For Self-Rule

The missionaries were to be careful in receiving converts. Although baptism was not to be too long delayed, it was to be preceded by instruction. There was also to be a further period of instruction before the candidate was to be admitted to Communion. Public worship was to be arranged on Sundays as soon as the congregation had two or three members.

Missionaries, having led the congregations from the beginning, were expected to strive to make members capable of leadership as soon as possible. Elders were to be formed into a “consistory”, which was to be taught to help in making the congregations self-supporting, being able to maintain their own Church and school.

Annual financial reports were to be given; a Church Order was to be drawn, and the first Liturgy was to be revised by Africans. The Church Order was also to be revised every three years.

The above guidelines sound very good and, in fact, some historians, for example, Grau, have judged that the Bremen Mission had a positive approach to African culture. To some others, however, the guidelines were only there on paper and were not put into practice. Provisions in the guidelines for the missionaries to “show sympathetic appreciation of customary practices while condemning obsolete and wrong practices”, for example, would appear not to have been heeded as almost all the customary practices of the people were condemned as wrong.

At this point, we would like to bring up some of the beliefs and practices of the Ewe-dome and their encounter with Christian beliefs and practices.

### 3.3.2. Missionaries and the traditional Ewe-dome Spirituality

#### Missionaries and the concepts about *Mawu* and *trɔwo*

The Ewe-dome, we have noted, believe in the existence of an ultimate God (*Mawu*), believed to be the creator of the universe and all that is in it. *Mawu* is believed to be everywhere (ele afisiafi) even though at the same time, He is believed to be in dzime or dzifo (the sky). Many names in Ewe-dome are, in fact, related to *Mawu* - pointing to His providence. For example, Mawuli - *Mawu* is there; Mawuena - it is *Mawu* who gives or has given; Mawuse - *Mawu* has listened; Senam - it is *Mawu* Himself who has given. People call on the name of *Mawu* in times of distress - for Him to come to their aid; or in times of joy - to give thanks for what has happened, and so on.

Missionary attitudes to the beliefs about *Mawu* in Ewe-dome, one may say, have not been much of a problem. The missionaries adopted the name *Mawu* as a proper name and made use of it as such. The missionaries might have thought initially that it was they who were going to introduce the concept of God (*Mawu*) to the people as Wolf, for example, had said that he was coming to talk about “the true God”<sup>145</sup>. However, they must have realized that the people had already known about Him and had, therefore, adopted the name *Mawu* deliberately. It was like what happened among the Xhosa people, when the missionary, Van der Kemp, realized through questioning of the people, that they (the Xhosa) had already known the name of God about whom he came to talk.<sup>146</sup>

It is, however, one thing having to accept the name *Mawu* and beliefs held about Him, and another, having to accept the concept of the *trɔwo*, in relation to *Mawu*. In *Mawu*’s creation, as we have seen, are found also, some supernatural beings, *trɔwo*. The *trɔwo* are believed to have power and to play various roles in the lives of the people. They are believed to bring blessings as well as punishment, depending on the attitudes of the people towards them. Sacrifices are offered to them

<sup>145</sup> Quoted earlier at page 49.

<sup>146</sup> Sanneh Lamin, *Translating the Message*, p 161.

for various purposes. The shrines are supervised by priests and priestesses who serve as spokesmen/women between the *trɔwo* and the devotees. The concept about the *trɔwo*, we have noted, could be seen as ambivalent. On the one hand, the *trɔwo* are treated as if they are ends in themselves. We have noted, for example, a traditional religious believer, Afetɔ Wagba saying that sacrifices and supplications that are made to the *trɔwo* are meant for them to act, not to be carried over to Mawu (see page 33). This gives the impression that devotion to the *trɔwo* is devotion to other gods (besides Mawu) or, devotion to a part of Mawu's creation which, to the missionaries or to Christian understanding, is idolatry. On the other hand, the *trɔwo* are regarded as creatures of God, implying (and according to explanations that are usually given by some scholars) that ultimately, the devotion to the *trɔwo* is to Mawu.

The missionaries had observed the attention and devotion that was given to the *trɔwo* and came to the conclusion that the devotion to the *trɔwo* is idolatry, giving devotion to other spirit powers apart from Mawu. In order not to offend God (in this case Mawu), those to be baptized into the "new faith" (the Christian faith) were asked to deny the *trɔsubɔsubɔ* (devotion to the *trɔwo*) and to turn to Mawu alone. The *trɔwo*, as believers in the Christian faith were taught and still hold today, are demonic or satanic, out to destroy the good works of Mawu. By implication and by teaching, cultural practices that are related to the *trɔsubɔsubɔ* are, therefore, to be rejected. This must be a hard nut for some to crack. We have noted in our earlier presentation, the conflicts that the missionaries had to face with some of the traditional religious priests and priestesses.

Those who wholeheartedly accepted the "new faith" were able to sweep away everything that had to do with the *trɔwo* - in fact they had to bring out all tangible objects associated with the worship of the *trɔwo* for burning. They pledged they had forsaken the *trɔwo* and everything that had to do with them. Those who had not completely surrendered their lives to the missionary faith, however, in times of trouble especially, would secretly go back to the traditional religious priests and priestesses for consultation and solution of problems.

Furthermore, many taboos in Ewe-dome are associated with the *trɔwo*. It is a taboo, for example, not to go at night to the river Katatabui. The *trɔwo* are said not to like it. Again, it is prohibited to go to farm on certain days. However, with the departure of the *trɔwo* on the scene, such taboos had to go with them. Somehow, various quarters (known in Ewe-dome as *kpodzi*) were built for the early converts in the various towns. The aim for building the *Kpodzi*, it was said, “was to facilitate pastoral and educational services dispensed in a closed community of Christians and to protect the new converts from the pull of some doubtful local traditional beliefs and customs”.<sup>147</sup> This may be seen as flouting Zahn’s guideline number 3 which asked of the missionaries “not to withdraw their converts into closed communities.”<sup>148</sup> Those who lived in *Kpodzi* were able to flout the taboos while others, even some Christians, continued to obey many of the taboos. It should be noted here that some of the taboos may have moral and practical considerations behind them. The problem, however, lies with their being associated with the *trɔwo*. For example, the taboo on not going to fetch water from the river at night may be a way of protecting people from being bitten by dangerous reptiles that may be found around the area. Lights draw attention of reptiles to a person. However, the association of the taboos with the *trɔwo* has made them unacceptable by the Church.

#### Missionaries and Ewe-dome Ancestorhood

The Ewe-dome, we have said earlier, believe also that the dead are not completely annihilated. The belief, we have noted, is that there is a category of the dead who are qualified to be called ancestors. These have lived long lives, contributed to the welfare of the society, were not sorcerers or witches and died what is regarded as natural deaths. Befitting funerals are given to the dead. The relationship between the living and the dead is a never-ending one and the living, therefore, continue to serve the dead with food and drinks at appropriate times. The

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<sup>147</sup> Agyemang Fred, *Amu The African: Study In Vision and Courage*, Accra, Asempa Publishers, 1988, p 14

<sup>148</sup> See page 64.

dead may not be seen physically eating things that are given to them; but the belief is that they are taking the items spiritually. Individuals or groups of people also call on the ancestors to intercede on their behalf or to partake in various activities of the living. This is usually done through making of libation to the ancestors. The missionaries, as they observed beliefs and practices that were associated with the dead, felt that these were means of contacting the dead spirits, a sign also of dependence upon them rather than on Mawu. They, therefore, regarded such beliefs and practices also as idolatry. Many of the converts to the Christian faith were able to do away with the *trɔwo* and beliefs that are associated with them. Some, however, find it difficult to do away with the beliefs and practices that are related to the ancestors. In other words, at least, in their subconscious minds, they see nothing wrong with the beliefs and practices that are related to the ancestors. For, they believe the ancestors “are there”<sup>149</sup> and the communication between them and the living cannot be cut off, some would say.

#### Missionary Attitude to Belief in and exorcism of witchcraft.

Another traditional belief which the missionaries seemed to downplay is that about the existence of the phenomenon of *Adze* (witchcraft). We have already discussed beliefs and practices that are associated with witchcraft. Witches are regarded as evil people in the society who have witchcraft with which they kill people or cause havoc. Such a belief, we have observed, is not peculiar to the Ewe-dome. It is found among various other groups of people elsewhere.

By 1931, all the good intentions of Zahn’s guidelines offered to the missionaries seemed to have been swept aside. It was stated in Article 29 of the “1931 Hamedodo” (Constitution), for instance, that those who wanted to become converts should also confess and pledge that they would not partake in “any form of the traditional religious worship, festivals, funerals for the dead, drumming, dancing, divination, sorcery, belief in the existence and exorcism of witchcraft, and setting

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<sup>149</sup> That is the term that those of my interviewees, who did not see anything wrong with making libation to the ancestors, usually used.

days aside for traditional religious reasons".<sup>150</sup> So that here also, one would say, the belief in and exorcism of witchcraft was suppressed by the Church at the time. According to some, the suppression may be due to the treatment that was being given to the witches and sorcerers at the time. It was not only that the bodies of dead witches were maltreated before burial, suspected witches were also made to go through various ordeals at some shrines or witch-hunting grounds. Some had to drink concoctions or wash their face with them. Those who had ill-effects of the concoctions were believed to have committed the crime of witchcraft. They then had to go through other forms of physical and psychological torture. Some were banned from the towns. The missionaries, it was said, might have found these practices to be wrong. It could also be that, according to some others, the people were paying "too much attention"<sup>151</sup> to the phenomenon of witchcraft. Or again, the very going to the shrines to prove a person's innocence of witchcraft accusations was found to be against the teaching of Christians not to associate themselves with traditional shrines. Some, however, simply put it that the missionaries simply found the belief in witchcraft to be that of superstition.<sup>152</sup>

Witchcraft beliefs, however, are found to be so embedded in the life and thought of the people that till today, even Christians feel unsafe, and have fears about others bewitching them or transferring the craft to them. Further discussion of these will come in our later chapters.

Missionary attitudes to Ewe-dome cultural dressing, drumming and dancing.

### Dressing

Answers to my questions about missionary attitude to Ewe-dome cultural dressing vary. In summary, some said that the missionaries never asked us not to use our own attire either for Church services or for elsewhere. And that it was the people

<sup>150</sup> *Nyanyuie Hame Hamedodo*, 1933 : Traktathaus Agbaletafe.

<sup>151</sup> This view was expressed especially by some members of the Church's leadership, of the E. P. Church, Ghana.

<sup>152</sup> The view of Rev. Macwilson Atakoro of Ho, for example. Discussion with him on 13th March, 1997.



themselves who thought dressing like the whiteman was a status symbol - of agbalenyala (an educated person). Some others, however, quickly referred me to “the incident that happened between Amu and the Presbyterian/Ewe Church of the Gold Coast” and asked me whether I was not aware of it. Amu is no longer alive but fortunately his biography was written by Fred Agyemang in *Amu The African*. Below is an account of the incident that the people referred to.

Dr. Ephraim Amu was an indigene of Ewe-dome, a trained teacher-catechist at the time the conflict arose. He was a member of the Ewe Presbyterian Church, who in 1926, was seconded by the Church to teach at the Training College of the Presbyterian Church of the Gold Coast, in Akropong.

According to the report, “it was the unwritten convention at the time that teachers and catechists should not appear outside their bedrooms or homes in anything else but European attire; never in African dress or cloth”.<sup>153</sup>

“One day in 1931”, the report continues, it came to the turn of Amu to preach. Amu decided to conduct “the entire service of liturgy, reading of scriptural texts, calling of hymns, preaching the sermon, prayers and benediction in his African attire”.<sup>154</sup>

Earlier on, that is, in 1928, Amu had been sent to the Government Agricultural Training Centre at Cadbury Hall in Kumasi to do a course in Agriculture. He used to worship every Sunday at the Ramseyer Memorial Presbyterian Church. At the Church services, he was “impressed by seeing Asante Christian men remove the sandal from their feet and lower their cloth from their shoulder to their waist as they went up to the altar to receive Holy Communion”<sup>155</sup>. This was the way Asante men traditionally approached their chiefs. Amu was “determined to copy this beautiful act in our cultural life” in his approach to Christian worship.<sup>156</sup>

Soon after the eventful Sunday morning service of 1931, Amu was summoned to appear before the Church session. At this court, the first African

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<sup>153</sup> Agyemang Fred, *Amu The African*, p 59

<sup>154</sup> Ibid., p 74

<sup>155</sup> Ibid., pp 59 - 60

<sup>156</sup> Ibid.

Moderator of the Presbyterian Church of the Gold Coast, Rev. Peter Hall, then addressed Amu as follows:

My son Amu, we all know your fine ability, your musical accomplishments, your good Christian influences over your students, your work as organist in the church and leadership of the singing band. But we were quite taken aback to see you conduct Sunday service today in a native cloth which is so unbecoming of you, a teacher at the seminary where students are trained for the Church's congregations and schools. We hope and pray you will not do this thing again. After all, you may soon join us as an ordained minister.<sup>157</sup>

Amu's explanation of why he wore the native attire as against European dress "in our hot tropical climate" was not accepted. He was given one year to think carefully and change from his attitude. Amu, however, stood by his conviction and in a petition to the Synod Committee in July 1933, said among other things that:

I am convinced that it is nothing either opposed to the Spirit of Christ or lowering the standard of Christianity for an African in African attire to preach the Gospel from the pulpit to his own people in like attire, anymore than it is opposed to the Spirit of Christ or lowering the standard of Christianity for an African to preach the same Gospel in an African tongue to his own people...what once was condemned as evil may today be recognised as rational, and not necessarily opposed to the Spirit of Christ. So the tendency is to preserve more than we destroy, yet not to lower the christian standard of conduct but enrich the world with a purified variety.<sup>158</sup>

Synod, in its stand, saw Amu's explanation as a refusal to have a change in heart. And as a result of the "defiance", Amu was dismissed from the Presbyterian Training College in 1933.

Let me hasten to add that around the 1940s, it was realized that the dismissal was a mistake. In 1945, the Rev. R. S. Kwame who in 1933 was Synod Clerk of the Synod Committee of the Ewe Church that also confirmed Amu's dismissal, "confessed or admitted openly before the entire synod that the dismissal of Amu in 1933 was a mistake".<sup>159</sup> It was realized that there was no doctrinal or scriptural (or Christian) basis for the action.

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<sup>157</sup> Ibid., p 74

<sup>158</sup> Ibid., p 88

<sup>159</sup> Ibid., p 177

That in brief, is the story with which my respondents challenged me. What was clear was that it was not the missionaries at that period who were responsible for the negative attitude towards the native attire of the Gold Coasters. Elsewhere in the story, W. E. F. Ward, a music teacher of Achimota College who was instrumental in having Amu taken on the staff of the Achimota College after his dismissal from Akropong, said:

Amu is a devout christian teacher. But I learned from the Scottish missionaries that many of the old-fashioned African pastors disapproved of his wearing African dress in Church, and even in the pulpit. They had been brought up to think that European dress - black preaching gown and white bands - was the only suitable dress for Church.<sup>160</sup>

Again, the Rev. J. A. R. Watt, the Acting Principal of Akropong Training College at the time of Amu's dismissal, also said later that:

I tried to defend Amu, maintaining that he was a very valuable member of staff...and arguing that things European were not necessarily good...But eventually I agreed that though the Scottish missionaries were wholly behind Amu and the college would be poorer without Amu, the college was the responsibility of the Presbyterian Church of the Gold Coast and the decision in the matter was theirs.<sup>161</sup>

The above were observations of the missionaries. Coming from the Africans who were around at the time of the incident, it was reported, for example, that at a later time when Amu asked the African minister, Rev. Nicholas Clerk, the synod clerk of the Presbyterian Church of the Gold Coast at the time of the drama, to "show him the Biblical or doctrinal authority for the Church's stand against his donning of African attire to preach the Gospel", the former synod clerk replied that: "There is no scriptural authority except that our European missionary leaders and teachers did not train us that way."<sup>162</sup>

The sessions' reply to Amu in 1933 includes a statement that:

Since our mentors the Basel missionaries came here in 1828 they did not allow their teachers and ministers to wear native attire in public. It is never

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<sup>160</sup> Ibid., p 104

<sup>161</sup> Ibid., p 95

<sup>162</sup> Ibid., p 175

done. A church worker - teacher, catechist or minister - should always appear dressed modestly as a servant of God.<sup>163</sup>

The modest dressing in this case, “meant a European black woollen or alpaca coat and trousers, black shoes, white shirt and black tie and a black hat”.<sup>164</sup>

The impression one gets from the whole drama is that the Scottish missionaries were quite sympathetic to the course of Amu’s line of thought and behaviour, while the African leaders, under the influence of their Basel missionary mentors felt that “A church worker - teacher, catechist or minister - should always appear dressed modestly as a servant of God”.

One is not here to make judgements about an act over which regret has been expressed. Moreover, the dressing that was condemned has now become, as Amu had rightly predicted at the time, an act that was once condemned as evil but which today is recognized as rational. It has been vindicated and found to be “not necessarily opposed to the Spirit of Christ”. We are mentioning it in this essay because it fits into the historical narrative on missionary attitudes (European/African) to Ewe-dome cultural life. The Ewe-dome clergy at the time, like some others elsewhere, might have been attracted not only to the faith that the missionaries had brought, but also to all other things that were felt to be “all good gifts” from God. What Parratt wrote in his analysis and observation on Bujo’s viewpoints regarding some African Christians’ attitude to their culture is apt here. He stated: “Early converts to Christianity learned too well from their European mentors and, in order to show they had become ‘civilized’, showed an excessive zeal in condemning their ‘heathen’ past, and adopted often quite inappropriate European practices”.<sup>165</sup> Hence, perhaps, the attitude to European dressing. Or, it may well have been that the Basel missionaries really felt that traditional clothing was in some sense indecent. After such a long passage of time it is difficult to know what the exact position was at the time. All that one can say at this point of the thesis is that the European way of dressing as well as some other forms of their life style have had such “tremendous” effect on the people

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<sup>163</sup> Ibid., p 75

<sup>164</sup> Ibid.

<sup>165</sup> Parratt John, *Reinventing Christianity: African Theology Today*, Wm. B. Eerdmans Co. & Africa World Press Inc., 1995, p 126

that up till today, some find it immodest to dress in African attire (lighter clothing) to various functions; they prefer heavy attire of coat, tie, and so on, even on very hot sunny days in the West African tropical sun! Africans would have to give a second thought to this as part of their new paradigm shift, in their bid to change attitudes and as they engage in apologetic writings about their past. The missionaries are no longer in the Churches nor are they there at the helm of affairs, if that was the case. It is time for Africans to come back to their own selves and overcome the problems of “colonial mentality” which they often decry.

### Drumming and Dancing

Traditional drumming and dancing was another issue that the missionaries had to grapple with. By the 1930s, the traditional drumming and dancing of women in particular, was found by the Mission (including converted indigenes) to be improper<sup>166</sup>. Women in Ewe-dome have various styles of shaking the body while dancing according to the rhythm of the traditional drumming. This was found to be immodest as the women seemed to be drawing attention of men to themselves. Again, there was much drumming and dancing especially during funerals for the dead. Since the Mission at the time could not accept beliefs and practices that were associated with the dead, the obvious thing was to ask the converts to the Christian faith not to take part in such drumming and dancing activities.

The following observation, made by Bartels, even though it came out of the Methodist tradition, applied also to the Bremen missionary converts of the time:

...young people saw Christian living as a very grim business, joyless and sometimes burdensome...They could march, or shuttle along, in a neatly organized column, to a variety of Sankey and Moody tunes played by a village brass band, the women being permitted to sway a little to the rhythm of the tune, but not too much, while the men stepped out with dignity bringing up the rear.<sup>167</sup>

<sup>166</sup> Many of the women interviewed said that it was even considered improper for Christians to stand and watch those who were dancing the traditional dance.

<sup>167</sup> Bartels F. L., *The Roots of Ghana Methodism*, Cambridge Universities Press, 1965, p 234

To conclude this section on missionary attitude to Ewe-dome cultural/religious beliefs and practices, one would say that the missionaries might have done what they had believed was good - by perhaps European or what they had considered to be Christian standards. Some of their acts turned out to undermine some of the Ewe-dome traditional beliefs and practices. Some of these have to do with their trying to "displace" the traditional religious faith with its ramifications in the culture, with the Christian faith. Others have to do with what may be seen as relatively unimportant matters but which also invariably affect the thought and life-style of the people.

Volumes of work have, in fact, been produced by scholars about missionary attitudes to people of other cultures (not only of Ewe-dome) that the missionaries try to evangelize. Some of these seem to make blanket condemnation of missionary attitudes while a few are also sympathetic. To some, the whole missionary attitude to other cultures was simply a show of western superiority over the less technologically advanced African, for example. The western missionaries went out at a time when industrially, militarily and economically, Europe was advancing. There could, therefore, it is felt, have been a feeling of arrogance and superiority and this may have been transferred to the mission field. There may be the feeling that "western civilization" should be brought to Africa before any true conversion could be made. John Taylor, indeed, puts it succinctly that:

It has also to be admitted quite frankly that during these centuries, the missionaries of the Christian Church have commonly assumed that western civilization and Christianity were two aspects of the same gift which they were commissioned to offer to the rest of mankind. This assumption was sometimes quite conscious and was explicitly stated. More often it was quite unconscious and would have been indignantly denied.<sup>168</sup>

As if to sum up the reasons that are usually given for missionary attitudes, Baeta writes:

The fact that the evangelists and their hearers belonged to such glaringly different racial types; the fact that their cultural backgrounds were so different; the unfortunate associations of the colour black in European superstition; the Slave Trade with Europeans being always owners and Africans always the owned; budding imperialism; the growing consciousness

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<sup>168</sup> Taylor John V., *The Primal Vision*, pp 5 - 6



of power from scientific knowledge on the part of Europeans; the assumption by them of a position of superiority vis-à-vis Africans, which assumption Africans meekly and unprotestingly accepted; the fact that the majority of missionaries to our parts were connected with the movement known as Pietism...these and such-like factors determined the policy, which was adopted by all missionaries practically without exception, of non-amalgamation with, and aloofness from African culture.<sup>169</sup>

Baeta seems to have said it all. But over and against these generalizations, it is always important to note the specific detail in any specific area.

As said earlier, the problem with the various forms of African complexes vis-à-vis things European, one may think, can, to a large extent, be overcome by Africans changing their own attitudes. It needs a conscious effort by the Africans themselves. The issues that have to do with beliefs and practices of the Christian faith vis-à-vis those of African beliefs and practices, however, seem to be more complex than some would make us believe. In other words, issues concerning African spirituality that are also woven into some of the cultural practices are of a more complex nature than some would think. The early missionaries are no longer on the scene; but the issue of how African Christians may relate to their ancestors, for example, is a perennial source of conflict among groups of people in Africa that needs a deep theological reflection. The observation that was made by Danquah, for example, as far back as 1958, in relation to an Akan situation, is still the type that is being experienced in contemporary Ewe-dome; and which needs a theological reflection upon. He put it:

God's command is that we shall have no other gods before Him, but He does not command us not to honour our fathers and our mothers or our ancestors.<sup>170</sup>

The kind of honour that may be given to "our ancestors", without its being seen as dependence on other powers other than God, is of a perennial concern to some of the Ewe-dome Christians, as indeed, it is of concern to some other Christians in the other parts of the Ghanaian society, even today. Thus, a deep theological reflection has to

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<sup>169</sup> Baeta C. R., *Christianity and African Culture: The Proceedings of a Conference held in Accra, Gold Coast, May 2nd - 6th, 1955*: Scottish Mission Press, p 55

<sup>170</sup> Danquah J. B., in Smith, Noel, *The Presbyterian Church of Ghana, 1835 - 1960*, Accra, Ghana Universities Press, 1966, p 237.

be done before supporting or repeating some of the usual condemnation of missionary attitudes to African cultures.

It is significant to note, for example, that the rites of birth and initiation into womanhood, which are our concern in this work, have survived in Ewe-dome for so long, that is, even after the departure of the missionaries. In fact there is no record of the missionaries asking the people in Ewe-dome not to perform these rites, even though some aspects of the rites must have been of concern to them. This is unlike what happened in some other parts of Ghana (the then Gold Coast) where, at a Methodist meeting in 1887, a concern was raised (by both European missionaries and African converted Christians) that “something should be done to stop the people from conforming to certain native customs that were ‘out of harmony with Christian taste, such as parading of the town by young women, heavily adorned with jewellery, at the time they came to maturity’”<sup>171</sup> It should be noted that in spite of the above concern, even in those parts, some are still parading the town, heavily adorned with jewellery, at the time they come to maturity. This shows the magnitude of the problem the Churches are dealing with, a problem, among others, of what could be faced by those who try to Christianize a people who have beliefs and practices that are found to be meaningful to their lives, even as Christians. Even though such a concern had not been expressed in Ewe-dome at the time of early missionary activities, the conflict situation concerning the rite of initiation into womanhood has become heightened in these days than ever before, the reasons for which we shall examine in chapter 7.

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<sup>171</sup> Bartels F. L., *The Roots of Ghana Methodism*, p 124

## Chapter 4

### WE-DOME TRADITIONAL RITE OF OUTDOORING AND NAMING

Human life is considered the most valued of all things found on earth and to the Ewe-dome, children are the greatest blessing for a married couple. It is children who perpetuate the lineage. Children are valued so highly in traditional Ewe-dome society that a couple who are not able to produce a child after, say, two years of marriage, are faced with anxiety since they sometimes become the subject of gossip. The woman in particular, must begin to “do something”, that is, look out for help from either medical or traditional herbal practitioners. Indeed, there is a saying in Ewe-dome that: *Vivɔ nyo wu kotsitsi* - to have a child that is bad is still better than not to have any. Such an expression shows how desperate the situation can be for a couple that have no child. The birth of a child, therefore, is good news to the family and the society as a whole. The biological birth, however, is only the beginning of a process whereby the new birth is incorporated into the family, clan and society. Other ritual actions have to be performed to complete the process.

Rites associated with birth do not start with the naming ceremony only. They go further back to the moment of conception. In other words, from the time that conception is detected, and throughout the period of gestation, special attention is given to the pregnant woman to ensure maximum protection for her and the foetus. The society has laid down a pattern of taboos that are to be followed in Ewe-dome traditional society, by the pregnant woman. This is to ensure the safe arrival of the new life which, in some ways, does not belong to the mother and father only, but to the wider family and the wider community.

#### *4.1. Taboos for the pregnant woman*

The pregnant woman, in the traditional set up, wears small brown beads of a special type that mark her out as a pregnant woman, and one who ought, therefore, to

be treated with care. A large element of the care is in the form of taboos that include the following:

1. The pregnant woman should not eat in public or late at night. There are some people with evil eyes or *dzo* who would harm the pregnancy if they see a pregnant woman eating.
2. Foods such as okro and snails must not be eaten. Such foods are believed to produce excessive saliva of a slimy nature in the mouth of the child, which then drops on to the lips and chest and spoils the clothing of the child.
3. The pregnant woman is not to eat eggs - to avoid the child becoming a thief. Some also explained that the egg is a symbol of the womb, in fact the fruit of another female animal. It will simply be good, therefore, for a pregnant woman to avoid eating the fruit of a womb that belongs to another animal while one is carrying a foetus in her own womb.
4. A pregnant woman is not to eat beef - for fear of transferring the traits of the cow to the child.
5. The pregnant woman is also not to eat shrimps, for, they are believed to counteract the effects of any medicine that is taken.
6. The pregnant woman is to be faithful to the husband, in order to have an easy delivery. It is believed that good sexual moral conduct promotes good delivery stages. This taboo has also, the purpose of removing doubts about paternity of the child.
7. The pregnant woman is also to abstain from ridiculing or making fun of the physically deformed, lest the child takes on that same deformity. In the same vein, the couple are to avoid causing harm to domestic animals since any harm to the animal would be transferred on to the child in the womb.
8. Children are not to be beaten by a pregnant woman, for they will curse her.
9. A pregnant woman is not to sit down with legs stretched for people to step over. She will give birth to a notorious child should a notorious person step over her legs.
10. A pregnant woman is not to bathe late, at night - to avoid the "evil eye" from seeing both foetus and mother. The night especially is the time that witches are most active.

The above taboos, and perhaps some others, are to ensure maximum protection and easy delivery for the pregnant woman.

It should be noted, however, that in these days, many pregnant women do not keep some of the taboos, especially those dealing with food. Scientific or medical findings seem to make some of these taboos obsolete. For example, the forbidden foods are rather found to be very nutritious sources of protein for the woman and foetus. The pregnant woman in contemporary society, therefore, eats many of the forbidden foods. The Christian faith also seems to make nonsense of taboos associated with spirit powers, as these are no longer to be feared by Christians. Some Christians, therefore, do not care about them. The taboos, however, do continue to hold sway in the thinking of some and are, therefore, strictly adhered to by them.

#### *4.2. Time of delivery*

The delivery of the baby is taken care of by well-experienced traditional birth attendants. Care is also taken that those chosen to be birth attendants, in the traditional set up, are not witches. Nowadays, many in Ewe-dome go to the hospital to deliver and then mother and child are brought back to the house of the couple or to any place of their choice.

After birth, a child is kept indoors for seven days. Bathing, feeding, and all other things have to be done for it in-doors. The mother is also not expected to eat outside the room. All these precautions are to make sure that the child has come to stay. They are also to keep witches and sorcerers from interfering with the birth. I was told that "evil spirits (witches) like to prey on the umbilical cord of children, causing swelling of the navel, bleeding and subsequent death"<sup>172</sup>. Mother and child, therefore, need to stay indoors to avoid interference from sorcerers and witches. It is also a time to recoup after the birth. If the child is able to survive the seven days, then it is said to have come to stay. An outdoor ceremony is then organized for him or her on the eighth day. A child who does not survive the seven days is buried quietly

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<sup>172</sup> This is from a pastor of the E. P. Church, Ghana. (name withheld for the sake of confidentiality). It is interesting to note that in spite of such expressions by individual members of the E. P. Church, Ghana, this Church, at the same time, seems to be suppressing beliefs about the phenomenon of witchcraft.

by some elders in the family. Such a child is not to be mourned. The mother is to behave as if nothing had happened. This would make the child feel that his or her kind of birth and death are not welcomed in the society. He or she would, therefore, not think of coming back for that kind of birth and death<sup>173</sup>. The lack of mourning also opens doors for the coming of another child. The *aklama* (spiritual guardian), spoken of earlier, likes people who do not brood over their misfortunes.

#### 4.3. *Outdooring and Naming - Traditional Practices*

As already indicated, a child is outdoored eight days after its birth. Various preparations are made for the occasion. The husband has to provide the wife with such items as whitish cloth, headgear and sandals to match. White denotes victory and joy. Dresses, toiletries and other necessary articles are also bought for the child. Provision is also made for food and drinks that would be served on that eighth day. The drinks usually include alcoholic ones - in these days Schnapps.

The outdooring begins at dawn, just before the sun rises. All who must have known or have been informed about the rite are gathered in the house of the couple. It can also be the home of the paternal grandfather of the child. Many dress in whitish attire. The officiant of the ceremony must be a respectable person, with high moral standing in the family.

An elder in the clan is given a bottle of Schnapps by the father of the child. The child is held in the hand by one born on the same day of the week as the child. He or she must also be a well-respected person. The father of the child mentions to the elder, the names that are to be given to the child. These must include that of the birthday of the child. For example, Adzo (female) or Kodjo (male) for children born on Mondays, Yawa (female) or Yawo (male) for those born on Thursdays, Kofi (male) or Afua (female) for those born on Fridays, or Kwesi (male) and Akosua (female) for those born on Sundays. Other names are given to commemorate various circumstances surrounding the birth or occasions. Many Ewe names are related to *Mawu*; acknowledging His providence. For example, Mawuena (it is *Mawu* who has

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<sup>173</sup> These practices are not peculiar to the Ewe-dome; they are found among many of the other groups of people in the country, Ghana.



given), Mawuli ( *Mawu* is there), Edem (He has delivered me), Set (it is *Mawu*'s own), and so on. Some names also show the position of the child among the other siblings, for example, Mansa is given to a child who is the third female in three consecutive births. The male counterpart is Mensah.

The elder pours some of the drink into a glass and makes a libation prayer that goes like this:

Agoo na mi lo! Agoo na mi loo! Agoo na mi loo!  
 Mawu dzifot miey wo  
 Anyigba t miey wo  
 Et e nye agbe lo!  
 Tsiami se ne woado tgbuiwo gb be:  
 Le esime miey mi le ηdi sia, mi mey mi de v dzi o.  
 Agbe dzi ko miy mi do  
 An abe heyihi dewoe nye esi  
 Kodjo kple Abra wode won e wo.  
 Eye to ema mea, miekp vi ηutsu gaa de.  
 Le egbe nkekea dzia, miede devi..... sia de go.  
 Eye wots Schnapps atukpa ga deka nam  
 Be mak gbe dzi na mi.  
 Mina lamease ab ka drika devi sia  
 Miakle efe tame be woava zu ηud w nu na duk a kata.  
 Mina lamease, agbe didi, ga, dzilawo  
 Be woate nu akp edzi abe aleyi dze.  
 Ne amea de be devi sia man anyi yean oa,  
 Mia tgbuiwo miatr ηku de ame ma ηu.  
 Ne mimua, mia mue de amema ηu.  
 Mina madzimadziwo nadzi eve, et, ene.  
 Agbe neva, fafa neva, ga neva  
 Kuse, Kuse, Kuse.

This prayer is literally translated thus:

*Agoo!* (a word used in knocking at a door or asking for permission)

*Mawu* of the sky we call you.

One of the earth we call upon you.

Yours is life!

The spokesman should listen and carry the message to the elders that:

Our call on you this morning is not for anything bad.

It is only for life.

It is for some time now, that Kwedjo and Abra got married

And through the marriage, we have received this gift of ...*name*...

Today, we are gathered to outdoor him.

And they have given me (*the one pouring the libation*) a bottle of Schnapps to inform you.

We ask for good health for this child.

Open his mind, for his growth to be profitable to the whole society.

We ask for good health, long life and money for the parents;

For them to be able to take good care of him.

Whoever would live but would not want this child to live,

You, our elders, we ask you to turn your eyes onto such a person!

If you are drunk, be drunk upon the person.

Those who have no children should have two, three, four.

We ask for long life, peace and money.

Peace, Peace, Peace.<sup>174</sup>

Some of the drink is dropped on the ground after every sentence. At the end of it the one praying sips a bit of what is left in the glass and pours the rest on the ground. The pouring must be made towards the person performing the prayer. This is in contrast with what happens on occasions like difficult arbitration or war, when the last bit of the drink must be dropped away from the one praying. This latter action signifies that such occasions are not wanted in the life of the people.

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<sup>174</sup> This prayer was recorded at Ho, 15th June, 1997. It was prayed at the outdoorings and naming of a child whose parents are Christian; for the sake of confidentiality, name of child and parents are withheld.

The prayer is followed by throwing a bit of water on to the eaves of the house and this is allowed to drop on to the child, who is laid on the ground. The water is to introduce the child to the physical conditions he or she would meet in the world. For example, the dew he or she would meet at dawn when going to farm. The child is quickly picked up after a few drops have fallen on him/her. While some have stopped this practice, some, for example, at Kpandu-Dzoanti are still performing it.

In some of the localities, for example, at Amedzɔfe, a finger of green pepper and salt are held close (but not to touch) the mouth of the child, with the saying that: "Pepper and salt are for life. They are also for hard times (pepper) and good times (salt). Today you have become a person who should be able to work and fend for yourself. You must stay healthy and produce what you eat. Stealing should be far behind you".

A little bit of the hair is then cut off, known as *dzɔgbedadede*. The new growth that is expected after that, is taken to mean that the child has become fully, a human being.

While everybody is seated, some of the Schnapps is then passed round for everybody to take a sip and or at least drop a little on the ground as one pronounces the name of the child and wishes him or her a good life. Those who do not take alcoholic drinks can take the glass, mention the name of the child and with blessings, pass it on to others.

A paternal aunt of the child then presents the items that have been bought by the father to the mother and child. These are received by the maternal aunts of the mother. This is followed by the presentation of gifts from others. The gifts usually include dresses, pants, various forms of toiletries and money. Each of the gifts is announced by the officiant, who also explains the relationship of the giver to the child or to the parents. The announcement of these gifts is usually done with a sense of humour, mentioning what each specific gift is to be used for. For example, money to buy shea butter to massage the baby; powder from someone to the baby (girl) so she will smell nice and be the future wife of the person's male child, and so on. While this continues, drinks are served.

The officiant, intermittently, explains certain things that are involved in the naming. For example, should the child be named after someone in the family, the officiant has to tell the group the reason for the choice of that name. He tells of all the good qualities of the person whose name is chosen, and expects the child to follow the footsteps of that person.

The celebration continues up till about 8 a.m. Those who have to leave earlier than this can do so. The officiant then announces with thanksgiving for the support and gifts, that those who may want to leave can do so. Those who wish can stay on, to keep the company of child and parents. Food is served.<sup>175</sup>

The child, from thence onwards, can stay outside the room. She or he can also now be put on the back of the mother or someone else. Children in Ewe-dome as, indeed, they are over most of Africa, south of the Sahara, are carried on the backs of their mothers wherever the mothers go.

We shall, at this stage, state the reasons that have been given for the performance of the outdoorings and naming rite in the traditional set up.

#### *4.4. Reasons for the performance of Outdoorings and Naming Rite*

To give thanks for the life of the child.

To introduce the new-born to the society; giving him or her also an identity.

A time to rejoice with the parents.

A time to introduce the child to the physical conditions of the world as well as to teach or rehearse moral norms.

A time for re-union of relatives and friends.

*To give thanks for the life of the child*

Human life, we have observed, belongs not only to the physical world that is seen, but comes ultimately from the spirit world. Thanks should, therefore, be given

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<sup>175</sup> These practices are not peculiar to the Ewe-dome. They are practised among various other groups of people in the country, Ghana, with variations in detail. For example, among the Akan and the Ada, water and another drink like corn-beer are used alternately in touching the mouth of the child with such sayings as: "If you see or taste water, know that it is water; and if you see or taste any other drink, know that it is that drink". Moral lessons on truthfulness are being taught in such cases also.

to the Divine. The libation prayer in the rite explains the situation of the unity that exists between the divine and the physical. To neglect the rite is to be ungrateful to the spirit world, the consequences of which can be unpleasant. The child may be taken back or may like to go back to its source, for he or she would feel unwelcome by the human society. The aim, also, therefore, is to ensure a continued good relationship between the person and the supernatural world; something that is vital throughout a person's whole life-span.

*To introduce the child to the society, giving him or her also an identity*

Children are valued highly in Ewe-dome and the joy of adding one life to the society must be shared by all. Again, every child is expected to have a father, and the outdoorings and naming ceremony should normally take place in the home of the father, witnessed by the four families (*fometwo*) of both the father and the mother. A time of outdoorings and naming is, therefore, a time of informing the *fometwo* and, indeed, the whole community about a new addition to the group, and for the members to express their acceptance. A child for whom the rite is not performed can be seen as a stranger, one who may not be seriously regarded as belonging to the group - especially the paternal kinship. It is, therefore, a time also for officially informing the whole group and claiming recognition of paternity for the child.

Furthermore, the name that is given to the child during the ceremony marks him or her out as an individual person within the society. He or she is now to be known and called by a name which in later life, also points to the bearer's privileges and responsibilities in the society. That name will be praised or blamed depending on what the person does in the society.

*A time to honour the parents*

Childbirth is one of the difficult, if not the most difficult, pains that a woman endures. It is in fact said of a woman in labour *ele ku lem*, literally meaning, "she is struggling with death". It is an abomination in the traditional set up for a woman to

die in childbirth. Such a woman would not be laid in state in a house but at the outskirts of the town, under a shed. Her body would also be buried among the *ametsiavawo* ("those who fell in war") as discussed in chapter 2. Such discriminations in death and burial activities are, however, waning in modern society. All the same, to come out of childbirth safely and with a living child is something for which the mother in particular needs to be honoured or congratulated. The time of outdooing and naming, therefore, is a time of honouring parents, especially the mother, for coming out successfully from that experience. The gifts that are showered on them also go a long way in taking care of the immediate needs of child and mother. Gifts received from the father in particular are a sign of responsibility to mother and child.

*A time to introduce the child to physical conditions in the world, as well as to teach/rehearse moral norms*

The practice of putting the child on the ground and throwing water on the eaves to drop on him or her, among other things, is to introduce the child to the ground and water, physical conditions that he or she would meet in the world. The child is made not to be afraid of cold water or weather, so that be it in rain or sunshine, he or she would be prepared to work for his or her survival. The other items used in the rite, of pepper and salt, as explained in the performance, also give the significance that is attached to them. The child ought to take life seriously and work to fend for himself or herself. The moral teaching goes also to the parents who are expected to bring up the child according to the societal norms. Again, the very choice of the officiant, who must be a person of high moral standing in the society, brings in a moral responsibility as the officiant must continue to live up to expectation.

It is also believed that the name of the child has an influence on his or her character. The child is, therefore, expected to follow the footsteps of that person after whom he or she is named. If the person after whom the child is named is alive, then that person is also indirectly being charged with a moral obligation to continue



behaving responsibly for the child to copy his or her good qualities. Outdoorings and naming ceremonies are also, therefore, a time to measure one's lifestyle by the expectations of the society; a time for the family to rehearse its communal high moral standards.

The outdoorings and naming ceremonies of the Ewe-dome are not peculiar to the people. They are performed by other groups of people in Ghana, with some variations in detail in some cases. Thus, Kudadjie, for example, has also observed that the outdoorings ceremony is one of the important occasions on which moral lessons are formally given in many a traditional Ghanaian society. The child is counselled to live a responsible moral life and the adults are reminded of the society's norms and values.<sup>176</sup>

#### *A time of re-union*

A time of naming and outdoorings is also a time of re-union of family members and others who are invited. Those who might not have been seen for long periods may come together for a happy re-union. New friends are also made. Thus, the outdoorings and naming rite is also an action which plays a role in acting out and reinforcing the unity of the community.

#### *4.5. The Church's involvement in the rite of Outdoorings and Naming*

##### *4.5.1. The E. P. Church, Ghana and the rite of Outdoorings and Naming*

The Evangelical Presbyterian Church, Ghana has found the rite of Outdoorings and Naming an important one and, therefore, has provided for it in its liturgical order. The Church does not, however, accept some of the traditional reasons that have been given for the performance of the rite. It does not accept the libation prayer that is said to the ancestors. It has, therefore, modified the traditional form of the rite. The rite is performed in the home of the parents. It is usually officiated by the pastor, or

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<sup>176</sup> Kudadjie J. N., *Moral Renewal in Ghana - Ideals, Realities and Possibilities*, Accra, Asempa Publishers, 1995, p 56

catechist. Members of the family and others who have been informed or know about it assemble in this home of the parents. A liturgical order is followed as follows:

### Introductory Part 1<sup>177</sup>

The officiant, usually the catechist (or pastor), explains to those around what is felt to be the traditional understandings or reasons for the performance of the rite - (of which the Church disapproves). He says: In our country (Ghana), the rite of Outdooring and Naming is performed in various ways for various reasons:

1. The child will not live a normal life, if the rite is not performed for him/her.
2. The ancestor who may have reincarnated in the child would be angry for his or her not being welcomed into the society, if the rite is not performed.
3. The child is introduced to the conditions of this life under which he/she has to live.
4. The child is put in the care of the spirit powers of the clan.
5. To give thanks to the spirit powers that have taken care of the pregnancy for, without their help, the pregnancy would not have come up to the full term.

### Part 2

The leader gives the Christian reasons for the performance of the rite saying: Outdooring of a child is a special rite that brings up the purpose of *Mawu* for a person and the way that person ought to walk in order to achieve the purpose for his/her life.

1. The reason for the rite is to help the child to become what *Mawu* wants it to be, hence the putting forth of the child before *Mawu*.
2. The rite is also to give thanks to *Mawu* for His creating the child to be a co-worker in His Church.
3. To express the joy of the family, the Church and others for the gift of *Mawu*, that is, the child, and also to welcome the child into their midst.
4. As a sign of the support that the Church has for the newly-born child, and also to help in laying the child firmly in the hands of *Mawu*, the care that will be an everlasting one.

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<sup>177</sup> Liturgy Yeye: Evangelical Presbyterian Church, Ghana, 1997: pp 13 - 15. The liturgy is written in Ewe language and this writer has made a literal translation into the English language.

### Part 3

The child is brought out of the room by someone born on the same day as that of the child. It is, however, not compulsory to choose a person with such a birth day. The parents and all others are dressed in appropriate attire. (The colour is not specified but a whitish one seems to be taken for granted). The ceremony then proceeds as follows:

1. A prayer is led by the Church leader: "Our beginning.....".

The leader then reads Ps. 127: 3-5 or any relevant scriptural text. Ps. 127: 3-5 begins and ends as follows:

Lo, sons are a heritage from the Lord,  
the fruit of the womb a reward.  
Like arrows in the hand of a warrior  
are the sons of one's youth.  
Happy is the man who has  
his quiver full of them!  
He shall not be put to shame  
when he speaks with his enemies in the gate.

2. The prayer is to be followed by a song, from the E. P. Church Hymnary. Hymn 404, 405, or 407. Verse 1 of Hymn 404 goes like this:

Yesu fe ale menye  
Eyata dzi le dzo yem  
Le nye kplola nyui la ηuti!  
Ele dzinye kpom le nyiyem,  
Edze sim eye wolom  
Hetso ηko yeye ha nam

Literally meaning:

I am the lamb of Christ  
And for which reason I am happy  
For the sake of my good shepherd

Who has been taking good care of me  
 He knows me and loves me  
 A new name he has given to me.

Verse 1 of Hymn 405 also goes like this:

Kpo da devi ko meganye,  
 Nye nuse ha le sue.  
 Mele didim be naxo nam,  
 Yesu, fia mo nyui lam!

Literally meaning:

I am just but a child  
 My strength is also small  
 I want you to take care of me  
 Jesus, teach me the good way.

3. An extempore prayer is led by the leader.

4. Reading of Scripture: Luke 1: 58 or Luke 2: 40 or the leader to give some teaching that is as follows:

A virtuous man/woman works hard to take care of the home.

A virtuous man /woman tells the truth.

A good man/woman does not steal.

A good man/woman does not fear frost.

A good woman/man does not take a meal, *akple* (a favourite dish) that is not well-cooked.

5. A prayer - an extract of which is as follows:

Glory and thanks to *Mawu* in the heaven. We praise you for giving our sister a boy/girl in good health and happiness. We thank you for the good midwifery and care of the doctors....We ask you to strengthen the faith of the parents in you; give them good health for them to be able to take care of the child. Let your blessing be upon this child. Grant him or her good health, wisdom and peace at heart; and deliver

him/her from the snare of Satan so that he or she will grow up in your own glory. Amen.

6. The leader takes the child from the hands of the one holding him or her. He/she calls out the names that have been given to the child saying: "I am outdoorizing you in the name of God the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen".

7. A prayer: "*Mawu* our Father we thank you for this child (*the name of the child*). Grant the parents health and wealth to enable them take care of him or her while looking also on to Christ as the exemplar. Amen".

8. The Lord's prayer; to be followed by Benediction.

9. Closing Hymn : 4, 15, 9 or 159. Gifts are presented to the child in the course of the singing. Hymn 4 has the first verse as follows:

Oo, de makpo ade akpewo  
Kple nu akpeakpewo ha!  
Ekem mako nye gbe akafu  
Wo Mawu fe domenyonyo.  
Ade gbe fa wo nunyuie ga,  
Siwo kata newo nam la!

Literally meaning:

Oo, if I were to have a thousand tongues.  
And thousands of thousands of mouths!  
Then I will raise my voice to praise you  
You, Mawu's kindness  
I will proclaim your goodness  
All that you have done for me!

Those who want to leave may do so after the closing hymn.

#### 4.5.2. *The E. P. Church of Ghana and the rite of Outdoorizing and Naming*

The E. P. Church of Ghana has not as yet come out with a written liturgy for the rite of outdoorizing and naming of a child. A Committee has, however, been appointed to work on such matters. The Church has accepted the rite as an important

one. It is, therefore, performed though not with any official liturgy. The ceremony is seen as an occasion on which to give thanks to *Mawu* for the child; to ask for His blessings and continuous sustenance of the family; for the child to grow up in truth, in love and in constant fellowship with her or his maker. The parents are also wished good health and prosperity.

The rite is performed by the pastor or a leader of the Church in the home of the parents of the child. The practices are very similar to those of the E. P. Church, Ghana. The E. P. Church of Ghana, on principle, does not accept the use of alcoholic drinks. Like the sister Church, the E. P. Church, Ghana, it also strictly forbids pouring of libation. A pastor of the Church, Pastor C. F. Gbekor, told me that “anybody who engages in that practice (of libation) cannot be said to be a genuine member of the Church for that would mean the person does not understand his or her faith in Christ”<sup>178</sup>.

As one watches or reads through the rite of Outdooring and Naming of the Church and compares the activities with those in the traditional set up, one notices some similarities and differences.

The rite in the traditional set up, is started with a libation prayer by an elder in the clan. In the Churches, the rite is started with a prayer by the pastor or leader of the Church. The prayer is said to *Mawu* only and not in the form of libation. A prayer that calls on the ancestors or any spirit power, other than *Mawu*, is rejected by the Churches.

The one who carries the child to the place of the ceremony in the traditional system must be a person born on the same day with the child. He or she should also be of the same gender and of good morals. In the Churches’ practice, the one who carries the child to the place of the ceremony can (preferably but not compulsorily) be a person born on the same day as that of the child.

In the traditional set up, water is thrown on to the eaves and few drops are allowed to fall on to the child. Pepper and salt are then held close to the mouth of the

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<sup>178</sup> Pastor C. W. Gbekor, E. P. Church of Ghana, Accra, interviewed on 3rd March, 1997 (No. 30 under Bibliography).



child with moral injunctions for the child to grow into a hardworking person who would fend for himself or herself. This practice is not observed by the Churches.

Furthermore, in the traditional set up, a bit of the hair is cut. The practice is known as *dzɔgbedadede*. The new growth of hair that will come after the cutting is taken to mean that the child has become fully, a human being. This practice is not observed by the Churches.

In the traditional set up, drinks provided by the parents of the child (including alcohol) are served. It is also expected that a bit of the alcoholic drink that is passed round will be poured on the ground, as one mentions the names of the child and asks blessings for him or her. This practice is not found in the liturgy of the E. P. Church, Ghana. However, drinks (including alcohol) may be served. No pouring of the drink on the ground is, however, allowed. The E. P. Church of Ghana does not make use of alcoholic drinks. Soft drinks can be served.

Gifts are then accepted from well-wishers. This practice is found in both the traditional set up and in the Churches.

We shall in later chapters, discuss the main issues of difference that are found in the traditional set up and those of the Churches; as well as issues of difference between the two Churches.

## Chapter 5

### RITE OF INITIATION INTO WOMANHOOD

#### 5.1. The rite in Aveme Traditional Area

The stages for the rite of initiation into womanhood in Aveme traditional area used to be classified into three. At present only two of these stages are usually practised. The three stages are known as 1. *Gbɔtowɔwɔ*, literally meaning, living and doing something outside the village. 2. *Lekewɔwɔ*, glorifying or adorning a girl into womanhood, and 3. *Asimede* - visiting the market.

Although the first stage is now almost always discarded, the latter two stages are still gone through by the initiands. I shall, however, describe all the three stages so that we might see the rite in its “original” state.

#### Stage 1<sup>179</sup>

The first stage of initiation into womanhood, known as *gbɔtowɔwɔ* started with girls who had their menstruation for the first time. A special hut was built outside the village for such girls since it was believed that they must not live among others in the village. Women in their periods in those days were believed to be ritually unclean. Also, their situation, it was believed, would make impotent the working of spirit powers that are found in some homes. Apart from these beliefs, it was also the time for the first menstruant to go through rituals and receive teachings to mark the stage which she had entered as a woman in Ewe-dome, that is, the stage of womanhood.

The girl was taken to the special hut by the elder *tasi* (paternal aunt). The *tasi* plays very important roles in Ewe-dome particularly with regard to rituals. She is regarded as one whose blessings or curses are potent. In the hut, an egg, a symbol of

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<sup>179</sup> Most of this information on this defunct stage was provided in Aveme-Beme, by people who include: Afen ɔVictoria Matey, Bempong Stella, Wiayefamia Gyenkyema, Comfort Folivi-Abima and Afet ɔOpoku-Abimah ; (12th April, 1997; Nos.63, 51, 65, 60 and 38 respectively in the Bibliography).

fertility, boiled by the *tasi*, was put to the lips of the girl. This particular touching of the lips of the girl by the *tasi* is still observed, but it is done in the house where the rite is today observed<sup>180</sup>. As the mouth is touched with the egg, the girl is wished many children and all good things in life. The mother and other kinswomen used to come round to the hut, to explain to the girl the stage into which she had entered. The girl was told to regard herself no longer as a child, but to see herself as “a woman”, one who is capable of having children. She was advised to take care of herself hygienically, making use of lime and other traditional herbs that would prevent her body and the bathroom from being offensive to others. Moral advice was also given, asking her to keep away from men. She was to be chaste until she got married. On the day after her entry to the hut, cooked and mashed yam mixed with palm oil, sprinkled over with pieces of boiled eggs, was prepared and distributed to all women in the clan. That was a way of informing them about the situation of the new woman. The young woman could be visited by friends and others who had gone through the stage. The coming out of the hut would then be followed by the other stages that we shall soon describe. These days, girls no longer go through the seven days of seclusion in a hut. Special huts are, in fact, no longer built. Some of the girls do not even want their mothers to know that they are in their menstrual period. Others, for economic reasons, would wait until they are able to prepare fully for the further stages of the rite before they would make any kind of announcement to others about their intention to go through the rite. In other words, it is nowadays even acceptable for a young woman, for economic reasons in particular, to wait for one or two (or more) years, after her first menstruation, before performing the two stages of the rite of initiation into womanhood. The rite involves a lot of expenditure and this delay gives time to the parents or to the girl to prepare well for it.

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<sup>180</sup> Refer to picture at p 217.

## Stage 2 (stage 1 in contemporary society)

To go through the second stage of the initiation rite, which in contemporary society has become the first stage, parents and or the girl/woman must make preparations by collecting of foodstuffs that includes brown rice, meat (2 goats), yam, palm fruits, and drinks. Other items are cloths (about four half-pieces of wax prints), three or four of the traditionally woven kente cloths (*Ewedo*), cooking utensils, kitchen stool, beads, jewellery and other ornaments that are needed to adorn the young woman.

A day is fixed; it is usually the girl's birthday or a suitable Saturday. The queenmother<sup>181</sup> of the village/town is informed and the message is passed on to others. A morning is set aside four or five days before the performance of the rite, for pounding of the brown unpolished rice, roasting, grinding and storing of the flour. At dawn, at about 5.30 a.m. of the fixed day, women in the town (and men who care) assemble at the entrance of the house of the initiand. The initiand is led out of the house by the *tasi* to stand conspicuously in front of the gathering. She wears an ordinary house dress. Songs are sung by the women which are meant, as they would say, "to hoot out any *gbetsi* that may come into the life of the initiand"<sup>182</sup>. *Gbetsi*, we have already discussed, (cf. chapter 2), is believed to be a spiritual entity that follows a person from the spirit world to the world of the living. It is usually conceived of in negative terms, that is, it is an entity that makes a person not to live a virtuous life. To sing and hoot out the *gbetsi* is to clear the way for the girl to live a worthy life in the society. One of the songs that are sung at this time goes like this:<sup>183</sup>

Ne miwlui loo

Ayee, Adzoa gbetsi miyɔe

Gbetsi le to ɲu

Miwlui nam loo.

Literally meaning:

<sup>181</sup> To remind ourselves, a queenmother is one who helps in supervising political authority on matters that affect women in the area.

<sup>182</sup> Refer to pictures at pages 217 - 222 for some of the descriptions in the processes.

<sup>183</sup> All songs written in this work were tape-recorded on the days of the performance of the rites.

Let us shout out

Yes, Adzo's (name of girl) *gbetsi* we call it.

The *gbetsi* at the side of the mountain,

Shout it out for me.

After the singing of the songs, the initiand is given some water to wash her face. The water contains a herb known as *bedzafe*, believed to bring peace. All participants then enter the house to start preparing the festive dishes. The first meal that is prepared is boiled and mashed yam mixed with palm oil and salt. This is dished out in plates and on top of the yam is put boiled eggs.

The young woman, bathed with *mumoetsi* - water with lime - is dressed up in the locally woven kente cloths, with a silky headkerchief to match, and seated on a spread mat. The young woman is dressed so that her shoulders are bare. The *tasi* comes round and touches the mouth of the young woman with a morsel of one of the eggs. In the process, the *tasi* wishes the girl every good thing in life. She is told: "Today, the rite of initiation into womanhood is being performed for you. You have become a woman and must live well, be healthy, grow old and have children".

The initiand then distributes the mashed yam with the eggs among girls and boys who have assembled around her. Some of this food is also taken round the town and given to women who could not come round for its preparation.

The other meal of the day is then prepared from brown unpolished rice flour. The meal is made into cylindrical shapes. It is served with palm nut soup that is prepared with goat meat. The unpolished brown rice is cultivated in Ewe-dome; its cultivation is very tedious and heavily labour intensive. The seeds are planted in the ground prepared with the hoe. Weeds are removed from among the rice as it grows. Then comes the harvesting. The chaff is removed from the grains after pounding. The grains are then roasted, and ground into flour. Women play major roles in all these processes and the use of this food is meant to signify the hardworking nature of women in Ewe-dome. There is the belief also that food produced locally is healthier and more "effective" in the performance of rites, than food imported from outside.

In the course of the preparation of the meal, the women sing songs, one of which is as follows:

Miva mifo hakple ne midu loo

Miva mifo hakple

Meaning:

Let us come together to prepare the community meal that we shall eat

Let us come together and prepare the community meal.

The food is served to the whole community. The whole community actually participates in the activities. In the course of the sharing of the meal a song is sung:

Adase miado na woe

D▷ menya w▷na o

Adase miado na woe.

Meaning:

Thanks we give to the provider

Working is not easy

Thanks we give to the provider.

While the preparation of the meal continues, the initiand is dressed gorgeously in her *Lekew▷w▷* (adorning) make-up. She is then seated on a stool at a specially prepared place in a family home, to receive congratulations and gifts. Her attire is usually that of a pair of kente cloths, beads, and golden earrings, matched with silky headkerchief and beautiful locally made sandals known as *Oheneba*. Beautiful designs made from ochre are made on the arms, back and the chest. The kind of design that is made points to the clan from which the young woman has come. Items that are presented to her by her parents (mother especially) are displayed for all to see. The mother herself dresses beautifully and sits by the items that she has provided. There is singing, dancing and merry-making. Later in the day, accompanied by her peers and other young women, the initiand is walked from house to house to thank everybody, and needless to say, to display her coming of age and appearance on that day. If the girl is betrothed, she is taken to the house of her fiancé who gives generously to her. In some areas, there are fixed amounts that the fiancé should give to the betrothed young woman at this time.



### Stage 3(stage 2 in contemporary times)

Throughout the week, the initiand must dress up in richly adorned cloths. This is a way of advertising the wealth and worth of the family as well as her beauty and marriageability. On a market day during the week, she must again dress up gorgeously to attend the local market. The market days are held after every four days and people come round from the district to buy and sell. It used to be the case that many peers of the initiand would also be gorgeously dressed by the family to accompany the young woman. This act of providing such a large number of clothing and accessories is beyond most families today. It is, therefore, usual for the initiand, in the company of only one or two friends, to go to the market. The going to market is again to advertise the coming of age and self-discipline that the young woman has exercised, not only to the members of her town, but also to others who may come from various other towns to the market.

The initiand (if a Christian), is again well-dressed and attends Church service on the Sunday of the week to mark the end of the rite.

The rite is considered so important that it is performed upon their death, (while laid in state), for those who do not perform it before their death. It is an insult for an Aveme woman to be asked *ele mumoe tsi kpoa?* meaning, “have you ever bathed with lime water?” Bathing with lime water, we said, is one of the ritual acts that the young women go through in the rite. What is being implied in the question, therefore, is that the person is not a “woman” because she has not performed the rite.

### 5.2. Kusakɔkɔ - *Initiation into womanhood in Avatime Traditional Area*

The rite of initiation into womanhood in Avatime traditional area is called *Kusakɔkɔ*, literally meaning, “giving cloth”, that is, equipping a young woman with cloths - getting her ready for the future (marital) home.

#### Stage 1

As in Aveme, prior preparations are made in the form of collecting foodstuffs that includes brown unpolished rice, fish (it used to be meat), palm fruits, beans and drinks; cloths, cooking utensils, beads, and other ornaments that are needed for the rite. Until the 1970s, there seemed to be no limitation on the number of items that

could be given to the initiand. The items must include prescribed locally woven cloths known as *Kotokoto*, *Ntsrim* or *Wadza* and *Kugosa*. In these days, however, there is a limit to what the mother is expected to give to the daughter. The fixed items as at the time of writing are: 4 traditionally woven kente cloths (*Kotokoto*, *Ntsrim* or *Wadza*, *Kugosa* and any one other); 4 wax prints of 6 yards each (half-pieces) known as *Bemusa*; 4 headkerchiefs to match the cloths; sandals, beads and jewellery, cooking utensils and a kitchen stool. These are to be presented to the initiand by the mother. The foodstuff will be used in the preparation of the meals for the occasion.

A day is fixed, usually a Monday or Thursday or, on rare occasions, a Saturday. These days are regarded as peaceful days in Avatime. The queenmother of the town is informed and, through the distribution of palm wine, the message is passed on to all. If the ceremony is to be held on a Thursday, then the Monday of the same week would be used for pounding, roasting, grinding and storing of the rice flour. Should the ceremony take place on a Monday, then the Thursday of the previous week would be set aside for this preparation. The preparation is usually undertaken by all the women in the town or village, who must have been informed about it on the previous evening. The pounding of the rice, as in Aveme, usually starts very early in the morning, about 5.30 a.m. and by 7.30 a.m. people could leave for other business of their own while kinswomen stay on to help with the necessary finishing touches. The rice flour is stored in very large pots in which is placed *Olivemen*<sup>184</sup>, a kind of herb, and salt. These items, I was told, help in preservation of the flour.

All women are expected to be in the home of the initiand on the fixed day, for the preparation of the meals for the day. The large beans that would be added to the palm nut soup would be prepared overnight. It is usually the elderly women who come round to start the preparation and in the process, they use some of the already cooked beans to prepare some soup (without palm fruits) and preferably with some bush meat<sup>184</sup>, with which they serve themselves. While this is going on, the palm

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<sup>184</sup> Bush meat, as the name implies, is meat got from animals that live in the bush. It is preserved through smoking and kept for use any time it is needed.

fruits that would be used in the preparation of the main soup, are put on the fire. Others arrive to help in the preparation.

The initiand takes her bath and awaits the *tasi* (paternal aunt) and others to come and adorn her. This takes place at specially prepared rooms where the initiands would sit throughout the day to receive congratulations and gifts. The *tasi* must be the first to put beads on the left hand and a few others on the knees of the initiand. She then holds the *kugosa*, one of the prescribed traditional kente cloths, and showing it three times to the initiand, tells her that: "Today, you have become a woman. You will live to see the fruits of your labour, grow old, have many children, nothing should disturb your future home, and live a good life in the community". The exact words may vary depending on the choice of the *tasi*; but in sum, they are exhortations for good life and good wishes for the initiand. The cloth is then wrapped around the waist of the initiand, who is also already dressed in a pair of cloths provided by the *tasi*. This is followed by further putting on of beads on the right hand and the neck by the maternal aunts of the initiand (*nɔgawo*).

The adorned girl/woman is seated in the already prepared room with a *dasefo* - another well-adorned peer mate - who would be at the call of the initiand throughout the day. While the cooking is going on in the home of the initiand, she, with other young women are seated in the well-prepared room, somewhere else in the clan. There is singing and dancing and general merry-making with the initiand. The initiand is served with the festive meal, *bimukɔ*, served with the palmtree soup - as it is the case in Aveme traditional area. This is done by her *dasefo* and friends who are attending on her, eager to help her. She also receives gifts. A song that is usually sung, among others, goes like this:

Mikpɔ alesi wonyoe da

Kple alesi wovivina

Be nɔviwo nawo deka

Anɔ anyi le ɔɔ me

O mikpɔ da

Lesi wonyo

Kple alesi wovivina

Be nɔviwo nawɔ deka

Anɔ anyi le lɔlɔ me

Literally meaning:

Look at how good it is

And how sweet it is

For people to come together

And live in love.

O, look at it

How good it is

And how sweet it is

For people to come together

And live in love.

The local dance bands may be invited to join in the celebrations. Women do the cooking but the men are also expected not to go to farm or out for other occupational activities. The mother of the initiand, as it is the case in Aveme, sits besides the items she has provided, and also dresses in beautiful clothing with beads. She receives congratulations with much joy. The father of the initiand also, in the home of the elder in the clan, enjoys the company of men in the community as they partake in some of the festive meal that is given to them. The food and drinks are shared and the activities could last throughout the day.

## Stage 2

The following morning, at about 7 a.m., the initiands are again dressed up in their best costume, with the kente cloths and gold chains and bangles. In the company of members of the peer group and others (including young men), they walk and dance through the principal streets, thanking people for their support. As they walk down the streets, some people do spread cloths on the ground for the initiands to walk on. Perfume is freely sprayed on them and any sweat on the faces of the initiands is wiped away by the other young women. They are treated with great respect in the town. They stop at vantage points in each clan to give thanks, calling the name of the clan area and saying: *Mlɔe wa lixɔe kivo loo!*, literally meaning, "Thank you for yesterday's activities".

They then go back home and while standing, an elderly woman in the paternal clan of the initiand, pours a calabash of water which contains a herb, on the feet of the initiands. It is a way of removing any dirt on the initiand as she walked through the town. Coins are mixed with corn in another calabash and thrown among the audience for people to pick. That is a most exciting time as children in particular, struggle with others to pick the coins. Some also pick the corn which is believed to yield very fruitful harvest when planted. When all this excitement is over, the family and guests all share a meal, again consisting of the same festive dish (*bimukɔ*). These activities may last up to about 10 o'clock in the morning and people are free to go about other business after that.

### Stage 3

As in Aveme Traditional area, the initiands are expected to dress throughout the week, in the cloths and beads that have been provided for them in the rite. On a market day during the week, they are expected to go to the market and show what stage in life they have achieved and also the worth of the families. They are also expected to buy a few things from the market while they also receive gifts from well-wishers as they move around.

#### *5.2.1. The involvement of The E. P. Church, Ghana in the rite in Avatime Traditional area*

Quite recently, that is, in the early part of the 1990s, the E. P. Church had to face pressure from some young women who did not want to perform the *kusakɔkɔ* rite.<sup>185</sup> The young women had five main complaints: The first was that they did not want the *tasis* (paternal aunts) to put the beads on them as was the custom because, they claimed, these women, in some cases, had been bewitching initiands with the beads that are given to them. In other cases, they had been passing on the power of witchcraft to the young women by means of the beads. The second complaint was that the young women did not understand why they were not allowed to choose their own items that should be presented to them, especially the type of cloths. They

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<sup>185</sup> The information was received from the queen-mother of Avatime traditional area, *Okusidzɛ* Abofua Paulina V111, and *Afenɔ* Elizabeth Gbagbo, an elder in the E. P. Church, Ghana, Vane-Avatime, 14th April, 1997, Nos. 3 and 29 respectively in the Bibliography.

claimed that the prescribed cloths of *Kugosa*, *Kotoko* and *Ntsrim* or *Wadza*, must have some traditional religious connotations behind them to justify the compulsory nature of their prescription. Thirdly, the young women did not understand why the rite should be performed for even the dead (on their death beds), for those who are not able to perform it before their death. The young women would want to know why there is such a compulsion in the rite. Fourthly, the young women were also worried by the use of stoves (three large moulded pieces of clay known as *Etugu*) which were used in the preparation of the meal for the rite. Since no other way of cooking is used, the young women claimed that this showed that there must be some kind of traditional religious symbolism in the stoves. Fifthly, the young women were also worried about the first course meal (*nyagbadzɔ*) that is usually prepared and eaten by the elderly women who usually come early to start the cooking of the festive meal. This custom, it was believed, must have some traditional religious beliefs behind it; otherwise why is the meal eaten only by the elderly women (*bekusidze*)? They (the girls) would want to know.

The complaints of the young women were reported to the elders of the Church. The elders of the Church got together with the queenmothers to discuss the matter. They came to the conclusion that the rite is an important element in local culture that ought not be treated with contempt. The E. P. Church in this local area, decided to deal with the matter in the following way: At dawn of the first day of the rite, the catechist would go through a brief period of praying, singing and teaching with the initiands in the vestry. A woman elder in the Church would then perform the act of putting on the initiands, the locally woven kente cloths (*Kugosa*) in place of the *tasi*. The initiands would then pick Bible texts - like what happens during Confirmation. The texts, meant to guide the initiands in their life, would be read out by the catechist. There is a closing prayer, and all disperse for the homes after benediction, to start the homely preparations for the rite. The putting on of beads by the *tasi* is no longer treated as compulsory and whoever wishes can accept the beads from the *tasi* or use her own beads. All other activities are gone through at home, as described earlier. Any kind of stoves can be used that can give support to the heavy pots on which the food is cooked. The initiands attend Church service on the Sunday



of the week in which the rite is performed. As told this researcher by the queenmother of Avatime traditional area, those who would not perform the rite at the appropriate time do not have to go through the death ritual when they die<sup>186</sup>.

The E. P. Church of Ghana has so far “placed a ban on the rite”<sup>187</sup>, that is, it has put a “temporary” ban on the performance of the rite. This happened around 1992, after the schism of 1991. According to one of the pastors, pastor Benoni Akoto, the Church is at the moment trying to study carefully, examining the issues as above, to find out what further steps to take<sup>188</sup>. Further discussion and examinations of the issues raised above will be made in our later chapters. Suffice it to say at this point that there is a conflict in the conscience of some in the area over the performance/non-performance of the rite of initiation into womanhood, at least in the Avatime Traditional area.

### *5.3. Initiation into womanhood (Gbɔtowɔwɔ) in Akpini Traditional Area*

Initiation into womanhood in Akpini traditional area does not differ significantly from that of the traditional areas which we have discussed. The first stage of the rite, as discussed for Aveme, used to be a very important element of the rite. For example, the initiands had to leave the house and live in special huts at the outskirts of the town. This ritual is no longer observed in the Akpini traditional area.

#### Stage 1 (Old stage 2)<sup>189</sup>

Preparations are made, as in the case of the two areas already described. A day is fixed for the performance of the rite. Items for the rite include foodstuffs, of brown unpolished rice, palm nuts, meat (preferably goat), yam; beads, about three or more traditionally woven kente cloths, silky headkerchiefs, wax prints as it is the

<sup>186</sup> Interview with the queenmother, Okusidze Paulina Abofua V111, 14th April, 1997.

<sup>187</sup> The words used by Pastor Benoni Akoto of E. P. Church of Ghana, Amedzɔfe, 8th June, 1997; No. 10 in the Bibliography.

<sup>188</sup> Ibid.

<sup>189</sup> The writer knows of the practices as up to 1994; but the actual observation and recording of the practices for that year 1997, was done for her by Alex and Esther Abada of Kpandu. As explained in my introductory Chapter, the performance of this rite at Kpandu coincided with the performance of another at Nyangbo. The writer, who already had a good knowledge about the rite at Kpandu, decided to observe the practices at Nyangbo while the assistants named above did the observation for her at Kpandu. There had not been much change at all in the practices - for those in 1994 and 1997.

case in Avatime traditional area, jewellery, and cooking utensils. The queenmother of the village is informed and the message is passed on to others.

There is significant symbolism in the initial stages of the rite as performed in Akpini traditional area that is not found in the other areas. On the first day of the rite, the initiand, in the company of women of the peer-group (and others) goes to fetch firewood - a sign that she is mature to fetch firewood to cook for a husband. A meal is prepared with some of the brown unpolished rice and distributed among all who go out to fetch the firewood. The practice of fetching firewood exists in towns like Dzoanti, Gadza and Agudzi - those that are close to the forests. Those from towns like Gabi and Tsakpe which are more urbanized no longer go through this process of fetching firewood. In the evening of the same day, a bon-fire is made with the firewood amidst singing, dancing and jubilation. A string is tied around the neck of the initiand as a sign of identification on this first day of the rite.

On the following morning, the initiand, again in the company of others, is led to fetch a bucket of water to the house. This also signifies one of the important household chores that the young woman would have to do in her future state as a woman in a home. The initiand is dressed up in her best costume as is the case in the other traditional areas. This is done in the home of an elder in the paternal clan. While the preparation of food goes on in the house of the initiand, there is singing, dancing and merry-making with the initiand. A song that is sung goes like this:

Azɔ ko medo dudu me

Azɔ ko medo dudu me

Literally meaning:

It is only now that I am ripe for consumption

It is only now that I am ripe for consumption

Items that are presented to the initiand by the mother are displayed, that is, put at a conspicuous place for all to see. The initiand also receives gifts from others. Later in the day, the initiand is walked through homes to give thanks for the support of the community.

## Stage 2

The initiand in Akpini traditional area, like that of the other areas, is expected to dress beautifully throughout the week, to show her worth and wealth - all that was presented to her by her mother and the others. Akpini traditional area values the initiand's going to market, in a file with lots of peer-mates, all dressed gorgeously. Owing to economic reasons, the families of the initiands are no longer able to provide the resources for that ritual in the rite. What happens now is that individual initiands sometimes go to the market with one or two peer mates, dressed in their finery.

Christian initiands in Akpini Traditional area also go to Church service on the Sunday of the week to give thanks and finish off the celebration. Apart from that there has not been a Church interference, the kind we have in Avatime Traditional area, for, there has not yet been any issues of "official complaints" by young women, of the kind we have in the Avatime Traditional area.

The rite of *Gbɔtowɔwɔ* in Akpini Traditional area is also considered very important to the people, and those who have not been able to perform the rite before their death, have it performed for them as they are laid in state (on their death beds). It is also, in this area, an insult for a grown woman to be asked *ede asime kpoa*? This literally means "Have you ever been to the market?" The deeper meaning is that the person is not a woman if she has not performed the rite.

### *5.4. Initiation into womanhood in Nyangbo Traditional area*

The contemporary processes of the rite through which the initiands would have to go in Nyangbo traditional area are similar to those of the earlier areas that we have described. There is, however, a significant difference in the practices of stage 1, that no longer exists in Nyangbo area. I shall start off with this defunct first stage just to give information on what used to be the case.

### Stage 1 <sup>190</sup>

In the olden days, girls at the age of puberty in Nyangbo Traditional area were expected to visit a mountain (very close to the vicinity) at least once in a week for two months. A supernatural power is believed to inhabit the mountain and the girls were expected to be chaste at the time of the visits. Any girl who had defiled her virginity would be found out and punished by the spirit power. That was a strong deterrent for sexual misbehaviour. The girls were also confined for this period of time and expected to learn to spin cotton, using the spindle and distaff. The yarn that would be made out of the spinning was used in making the locally woven plain-coloured kente cloth, one of the prescribed cloths and one that is also used on many festive occasions. The girls were also well fed during this time of confinement and taught many values that are cherished in the society. These include how to wake up early and take care of the home, the husband, children, and oneself; as well as lessons on respect for the elderly, hospitality and sexual morality. As a result of the good feeding, the girls looked very attractive when they came out of confinement, “and appealing to men”<sup>191</sup>.

### Other stages

In contemporary society, young women preparing for the rite no longer climb the mountain. They go through similar practices as those of the other areas that we have described. The practices consist mostly of adorning the initiand with beautiful kente cloths, jewellery, beads and earrings. The initiand, as in other areas, is served with the festive dish of the brown rice meal and palm nut soup, the same food that is eaten by all others in the community. She goes round in the company of peers and others to give thanks and receive gifts.

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<sup>190</sup> Information on this defunct stage was received from AfenƆ Felicia Tosa and the husband AfetƆ Kofi Tosa and AfenƆ Comfort Tosa; 29th March, 1997; Nos. 41, 42 and 40 respectively in the Bibliography.

<sup>191</sup> Tɔgbe Tosa, Ibid., jokingly put it.

The initiand is also expected to dress beautifully with the cloths that have been presented to her by the mother throughout the week. On a market day of the week in which the rites have been performed, she is expected to visit the market for people to know the stage in which she is. She is also given gifts.

She, if a Christian, goes to Church on the Sunday of the week, again beautifully dressed, to mark the end of the ceremony. Even though some would no longer perform the rite, there has not been any "official" complaints to the Church, and the rite, in these areas also, is performed on the death bed for those who could not perform it before their death.

We shall, in the following chapters, discuss the religious, philosophical, moral/ethical issues that are involved in the rite of initiation into womanhood. We shall discuss also what the people think about the rite.

## Chapter 6

### HOW THE EWE-DOME SEE THE RITES OF BIRTH AND INITIATION INTO WOMANHOOD

#### *6.1. Rite of Outdooring and Naming*

There is a consensus among the Ewe-dome about the performance of the outdooring and naming rite. All those interviewed, both Christian and non-Christian, insisted that the rite is a very important one: A way of rejoicing with the mother, a means of welcoming the child into the community; an occasion for committing the child and the parents into the hands of the Divine.

Certain controversial issues have, however, emerged over the way of performing the rite and these centre on the making of libation and the use of alcoholic drink in the rite. To the traditional religious believer and some Christians, the occasion is seen as an important one in which the ancestors cannot be forgotten. They are present and their presence must be recognized. The libation is the way by which they are invited to give their blessing.

The official Church position is that the making of libation is idolatry. The moderator of the E. P. Church, Ghana, the Rt. Rev. Ledo, for example, put it among other things that: "What we do not accept in the Church is the pouring of libation to the ancestors, the pouring of libation to the spirits of ancestors. That practice, we believe, is not Christian"<sup>192</sup>. When asked further about "why libation to the ancestors is considered to be unchristian?" the moderator said:

We in the Church believe that Christ is the only mediator between us and God. The ancestors are dead, resting with their maker. We do not have to be invoking them to come back and participate in the activities of the living.<sup>193</sup>

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<sup>192</sup> In an interview with the moderator of the E. P. Church, Ghana, Rt. Rev. J. Y. Ledo, 7th January, 1997 (No. 35 under Bibliography).

<sup>193</sup> Ibid.



To pastor C. F. Gbekor of E. P. Church of Ghana, "Anyone who performs that act cannot be regarded as a true member of the Church, for that would mean the person does not understand the saving work of Jesus Christ".<sup>194</sup>

The sharing of alcoholic drink (these days Schnapps) is also an important aspect of the rite of outdooing and naming. We have already discussed how the drink, after the libation, is passed round for those present to take a sip, pour a little on the ground as one mentions the name of the child and asks blessings for him or her. Those who do not take alcoholic drinks are at least expected to accept the glass and pass it on to others, as they mention the name of the child and ask blessings for him or her. Some of the Christians, in particular those who belong to the E. P. Church, Ghana do not see anything wrong with the use of alcoholic drinks. To one of such people, "To say that Christians should not use alcoholic drinks at all is not Biblical. This is because there are instances in the Bible where such drinks have been used. Excessive use of such drinks is what the Bible is against, and of course, that can also lead to disastrous consequences"<sup>195</sup>. To one other person: "It is the new Churches in particular that are squeamish over such things. They speak in languages we do not understand and will always ask you if you have accepted Jesus".<sup>196</sup>

The use of alcoholic drinks is not allowed in the E. P. Church of Ghana. I have found the interview with one of the pastors of the Church, pastor W. Ashigbey<sup>197</sup>, to be to a large extent representative of the views of others in the Church and I shall, therefore, present it verbatim as follows:

Q : Pastor, do you make use of drinks (alcoholic) in the rite of outdooing and naming?

A : Not at all! It is a matter of principle in the Church that members should not take alcoholic drinks.

Q : A principle based on?

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<sup>194</sup> Interview with Pastor C. W. Gbekor, pastor of E. P. Church of Ghana, Accra, 3rd March, 1997, op cit.

<sup>195</sup> Name withheld, according to the wish of the interviewee, Ho, 4th January, 1997.

<sup>196</sup> Name withheld, interviewed on 11th January, 1997.

<sup>197</sup> Pastor W. Ashigbey, of E. P. Church of Ghana, Goviefe, interviewed on 24th June, 1997 (No. 16 under Bibliography).

A : There are many texts in the Bible that give advice against that. Let's see. Ephesians 5: 18, for example, says: "And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery; but be filled with the Spirit". Also, Proverbs 23: 31-35: "Do not look at wine when it is red. When it sparkles in the cup, and goes down smoothly, at the last it bites like an adder. Your eyes will see strange things and your mind perverse things..."

Q : What about the text in which Paul advised Timothy to take a little wine because of his stomach? The popular one that those who think such drinks should not be forbidden, usually quote?

A : Yes, someone once asked me this very question. And I asked him to kneel down so that I would pray for him to have the stomach problem from which Timothy was suffering. He could then take the drink according to the advice that was given. The man refused the prayers. You see, that is the problem. People just misuse Biblical texts, and they use them as excuses to do what is wrong.

Q : And what about the other text of Jesus turning water into wine at a marriage feast? The usual argument is that, if Jesus would make wine for use, then who are others to say that wine should not be used? That is another text that people usually cite.

A : And who says that the water that Jesus turned into wine was fermented water that could produce alcoholic drink? You see, the act was an instant one in which the water was not even left for days to ferment. The wine could not, therefore, be alcoholic. We need to examine issues carefully.

Q : Pastor, do you serve wine (alcoholic) at the Holy Communion?

A : Not at all! We serve wine that contains no alcohol. You see, some do come to the Church with various predicaments. These include alcoholics or drink addicts. The Church is able to save them through prayers and teaching. If the person is saved and you start giving him or her alcoholic drinks again, then you'll begin to stimulate the person's drinking appetite and you'll aggravate the person's condition as he or she goes back home to take more of the drink. So that in addition to what the Bible teaches, we need also to examine situations on the ground.

So thinks Pastor Ashigbey whose views represent those of the E. P. Church of Ghana.

Thus, even though there seems to be a kind of tolerance from various groups in the society, there are real conflicts in the conscience of some people. Some, I was told, either before the arrival or after the departure of the Church leader, would “do their own thing”<sup>198</sup> - that is, either making the libation or taking alcoholic drinks. Some are, however, satisfied with the Churches’ procedures. These issues of making libation and using alcoholic drinks will be taken up further in chapter 7.

The other ritual of throwing water on to the eaves to let some drop on to the child is found by both Churches to be not only obsolete, but also unhealthy to the child and, therefore, it is not practised by the Church. Many individuals also no longer practise it. Some, however, still perform it.

The other ritual of holding pepper and salt close to the mouth of the child and teaching the child lessons on perseverance, as discussed earlier, is also not performed by the Churches. However, many of the respondents do not see anything wrong with it and they would, therefore, want the Church to incorporate it in the liturgical proceedings.<sup>199</sup>

## 6.2. *The Rite of Initiation into womanhood*

A variety of views have been expressed about the rite of initiation into womanhood. This rite raises more problems than the rite of outdoorings and naming. The E. P. Church of Ghana, we have found out, has placed its hand on the performance of the rite. The reason given for this can be elicited from the interview that I had with pastor Benoni Akoto as follows<sup>200</sup>:

Q : Pastor, the rite of initiation into womanhood seems to be a very important rite to the people. What is your opinion, or that of your Church on it?

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<sup>198</sup> Name withheld.

<sup>199</sup> View expressed by Afetɔ Kumatse John, Kumatse Yawkpo and Tretsu Simon - all of Amedzɔfe, June, 1997 (Nos. 32, 33 and 44 in the Bibliography).

<sup>200</sup> Pastor Benoni Akoto of E. P. Church of Ghana, Amedzɔfe, interviewed on 8th June, 1997; No. 11 in Bibliography.

A : Thank you sister. Some of us thought it was just a customary practice to equip women for their future homes. But now, we have realized that this rite has some “fetish” connotations. My Church in the area has, for the mean time, prohibited the rite. We want to study the rite carefully before knowing what to do. We want to find out whether the Church can do anything at all about it.

Q : That is exactly one of my concerns too, that is, to find out more about the rite, and I pray that my work would complement your efforts. I have so far gone round to witness the rite in some of the traditional areas in Ewe-dome. I have been told that the main motive behind the rite is to equip the young women for their future homes; and to make merry with them. The rite itself basically involves food preparation, eating and dressing up in beautiful attire (kente cloths, beads and necklaces). What are your views about such practices?

A : Fine, that is all that they would tell you. But do you know, some of them do also pour libation to invite the spirit world to witness the occasion. That is idolatry.

Q : In the course of my fieldwork and at various places where I actually observed the activities, I did not see the people making libation. I think that has to do with the Birth rite only.

A : They won't do that in your presence. In [*he mentioned the name of the town*], for example, they do it and some even give some of the food to the dead. [ A mother in the Church who was also present with us at the interview also added “and before storing the rice flour in the pots for use on the day of the rite, they do put into the pots *Olivemeno* (some leaves) and salt - before they pour in the rice-flour. All these are ‘fetish’”<sup>201</sup>].

PASTOR CONTINUES : The belief also is that they are preparing women for their acceptance into the other world, that is, that without the rite, the women will not be accepted among the group of women in the hereafter. Which spirit world are they preparing them for? Don't men also need to enter a spirit world? So you see, we need a thorough examination of the situation before coming out with our convictions about this rite.

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<sup>201</sup> Name withheld, present at the interview as above.

PASTOR'S WIFE :[She was also present with us]. The problem now is that some of the women who have not yet performed the rite are not happy with this "ban on it". They are raising questions as to whether the temporary ban does not mean that they are not going to be rejoiced with in the community. These women who have not yet performed the rite, to be honest, are not happy with the ban on it.<sup>202</sup>

Q : Yes, that can really be a problem, for their minds have been conditioned about the rite ever since they were born. Pastor, what do you think about that also?

A : Look, my sister, the rite is in preparation for marriage, and if you have no man in your life, why then do you worry about it? Sister, the Church has been organizing many counselling sessions for the various groups of people in the Church. Marriage and moral teaching classes in particular are being organized for members in the Church. These, I believe, give good education to members on acceptable standards of life. The indigenous marriage rite itself is there, which the Church accepts even as a prerequisite for the Church blessing. The only problem with that is about the use of alcoholic drinks; but even there, money is given to the parties involved as a substitute for the drinks. To be counselled for marriage, that is, to be taught what is expected of a future home and a married partner, in addition to the gifts that one will receive out of the marriage rite (which include cloths) should be sufficient for a woman to live a decent life in the future. Anyway, we are still studying the rite.

Some other members of the E. P. Church of Ghana, when interviewed, expressed similar views. To Afen<sup>203</sup> Adjah, for example, the rite is also "a sheer waste of time. The money involved should rather be given to the young woman to trade with"<sup>203</sup>. Another member of the Church, Afen<sup>204</sup> G. Agyemang, puts it that "the rite is not even stated in the Bible. Above all, those who accept Christ need not be afraid of what will happen to them after death. It is those who do not believe that do entertain the fears that people talk about"<sup>204</sup>.

On the other hand, the rite does not seem to be a problem to many members of the E. P. Church, Ghana; even though some of them also think that the rite has lost

<sup>202</sup> Afen<sup>202</sup> A. Akoto, was present at the interview, Ibid. (No. 10 under Bibliography).

<sup>203</sup> Afen<sup>203</sup> A. Adzah, Kpandu, 20th April, 1997 (No. 5 under Bibliography).

<sup>204</sup> Afen<sup>204</sup> G. Agyemang, Kpandu, 20th April, 1997 (No. 9 under Bibliography).

some of its significance. They see the rite as “ a rich heritage”<sup>205</sup> that need not be abandoned: “ Such people think that those who are “discrediting”<sup>206</sup> the rite are only being fastidious, thinking that no customary practice should be performed by a Christian. “What are they worshipping at all that they wouldn’t perform the rite?”<sup>207</sup>, one of them asked. There was a case in one of the villages where a mother, because she belongs to the E. P. Church of Ghana, could not perform the rite for the daughter who is a member of the E. P. Church, Ghana. One of the *tasis* (paternal aunt) of the young woman who is also a member of the E. P. Church, Ghana, in agreement with the young woman, decided to play the role of the mother and performed the rite for her (the young woman). The mother of the young woman seemed to be helpless in this case, though not unrelieved that the rite was performed for the daughter. So that some members even of the E. P. Church of Ghana, are not comfortable with the “hand on the rite”.

An interview with an elder of the E. P. Church, Ghana concerning the rite is as follows:

Q : The issue of some girls not wanting to perform the rite of initiation into womanhood seems to be a disturbing one. What are your views about it?

A : Yes, we, that is, some of the elders in the Church and the queenmothers, have sat over the problem and it is now somehow resolved.

Q : The issue of why there should be prescribed cloths in the rite is not very clear to me. What do you know about that also?

A : You see, this area is a cold one, and our forefathers knew why they prescribed those thick cloths of *Ewedo*. They help the woman in keeping warm. These can also be used especially during wake-keeping for the dead. They are also for uniformity. It will interest you to know that one of the women who would not perform the rite and, therefore, did not have these cloths, would always ask me for one of the *Ewedo* any time she came home for a funeral. One of the very cloths that she despised was the

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<sup>205</sup> Afen E. Gbagbo, Vane, 14th April, 1997 (No. 29 under Bibliography).

<sup>206</sup> Ibid.

<sup>207</sup> Name withheld; 16th April, 1997.



very one that I would give to her. Isn't that funny? They are simply fussing over the tradition.<sup>208</sup>

Q : But this whole issue of being initiated into womanhood here on earth, and its being seen as a prerequisite for one's acceptance into the hereafter, that seems to be their problem. They seem not to be clear about the type of the hereafter one is talking about.

A : Sister, I don't see the rite in that sense. The rite is something to help in equipping a woman for her future home. You see, they would say all kinds of things just to discredit the rite. Yet it is a useful heritage.

To some other elderly women, however, the rite is important, for, a woman who does not perform it before her death would not be accepted into the hereafter. And that is the reason why it is performed on the death bed for those who are not able to perform it before their death. A custodian of customary practices who is also a member of the E. P. Church, Ghana, mama Theodora Bakudie<sup>209</sup>, for example, puts it that: "It is customary that every woman should perform the rite. And the rite is performed on the death bed for those who are not able to perform it before their death, otherwise they would not be accepted into the society of women as established in the hereafter." This same view was shared by some others, for example, mama Rosina Afedo.<sup>210</sup>

The interview<sup>211</sup> with the queenmother of Avatime traditional area, *Blone* (our mother) Abofua V111 gives further explanation concerning the issue and the rite as a whole.

Q : *Blone*, *Kusakɔkɔ* rite seems to be a very important rite in Avatime. What are the reasons for the performance of this rite?

A : I know the reason is just to initiate girls into womanhood; for them to become women. It also equips the women for their marital or future homes. The women are

<sup>208</sup> Name withheld, to avoid embarrassing the one who was borrowing the cloths - a kinswoman of the interviewee.

<sup>209</sup> Mama Theodora Bakudie, Vane, 21st April, 1997 (No. 18 under Bibliography).

<sup>210</sup> Mama Rosina Afedo, Dzogbefeme, 22nd April, 1997 (No. 7 under Bibliography).

<sup>211</sup> Okusidze Abofua Paulina V111, Queen-mother of Avatime Traditional area, 14th April, 1997, op cit.

given essential items, especially cloths, that they will need in their future homes. It makes you feel you are a woman.

Q : There are some Christian girls who would, these days, not perform the rite because they think it is unchristian. What do you think about that attitude to the rite?

A : Well, elders of the Church, in particular those of the E. P. Church and we the queenmothers in the community, have met to discuss this particular issue. Various reasons that were given as to what the girls believed to be the unchristian aspects of the rite were discussed. These include the type of earthen stoves (*Etugu*) on which the food is cooked. The girls are saying that the insistence on the use of the *Etugu* means there are some traditional spiritual beliefs behind them. It was said that the stoves contain some spirit powers hence the insistence on their use. This, we explained, is not the case. The three pieces of moulded clay give strong support for the large pots in which the food is prepared. And because of the frequent rains in Avatime, the stoves are packed and kept for use any time the need arises. It is not a matter of "insistence on their use" because of any spiritual beliefs; rather, they are used out of convenience. So that, to some extent, we have been able to resolve the seeming problems that were raised. But not all the girls will be convinced about this, I know.

Q : There is this other issue, that there must be a spiritual belief behind the entire rite. I was, in fact, told that those who could not perform the rite before their death would not be accepted into the next world, hence the need for it to be performed for them on their death bed, even when the person is laid in state. Some Christians are worried about this belief, since they do not seem to be clear about which other world the custodians of the tradition talk about. What do you, please, think about that also?

A : Well, my sister, you know and I know, that nobody can claim to have a complete knowledge about what happens on that other side. We simply do not know. But let me tell you a story about what happened to a woman in one of our Avatime towns.[*She mentioned to me the name of the town*]. A woman refused to perform the rite. She at one time became seriously ill and fell into a coma for some time. When she came back to normalcy, she asked for the rite to be performed for her. Sister, I am not telling you this to prove right what some think about the other world. As I said

earlier, those of us over here cannot be certain about it. But that aside, I think that the rite is simply a way of making girls into women. The rite equips you for your future home. It is also just a merry-making for the women.

Q : Let me please ask you one more question. Do you think that after their death the rite ought to be performed for those who refused to perform it before their death because of their Christian convictions?

A : Well, if only the Churches to which such girls belong would give them every needed support, stand by them and help to remove from their minds any fears relating to the non-performance of the rite, then all will be well for such girls. And when they die I do not think the rite ought to be performed for them.

To the queenmother of Kpandu-Dzoanti, Mian▷ Comfort Deh, however, the rite has to be performed on the death bed for those who could not perform it before their death. She narrated a story similar to that told by the queenmother of Avatime traditional area. According to her, an incident occurred in Dzoanti when the rite was not performed for a woman before her burial. The spirit of this woman, after some time, possessed a priestess of the town, proclaiming that she could not find a place in the ancestral home because she had not performed the rite. The rite was somehow then performed and since then, nothing has been heard again. It is against the background of the incidents that the rite ought to be performed for everybody, even on the death bed, (while the person is laid in state) for those who could not perform it before their death.<sup>212</sup>

Kpandu and the other traditional areas have not (as yet) experienced the problem of "recalcitrant women" as experienced in Avatime traditional area. By this we mean that no issues have so far been raised as was the case in Avatime traditional area. Members of the E. P. Church of Ghana in the area are, however, convinced that the rite will not be performed on the death bed for any who would not perform it before their death. Since none of those who would not perform the rite is dead yet, we are unable to tell what would happen in the future concerning the issue.

The traditional religious believers do not think the rite ought to be abolished, even though some concede the fact that it could be financially burdensome. To them,

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<sup>212</sup> Mian▷ Comfort Deh, Kpandu, 20th April, 1997 (No.24 under Bibliography).

it is the disuse of such rites in contemporary society that is causing many moral problems in the society especially problems of sexual immorality. Tɔgbe Tosa,<sup>213</sup> one of those who hold this conviction put it, among other things thus: “Let me tell you something, my daughter. It is not everything that because of Christianity, we must say is not good. In the olden days, girls who came out of the period of the rite looked plump, beautiful and attractive. They also respected people and behaved well in society”. This is because, in Tɔgbe’s opinion, “they were not only well fed at the time of their confinement (for the two months); they were also taught useful lessons on respect for the elderly, among other things”. These days, Tɔgbe said, “they hide under the cover of Christianity and would not do even the simple one that excludes climbing of the mountain.” People, according to Tɔgbe, no longer behave well in the society, “and at the point of death, on their death beds, when they begin to confess things about their evil lives, other Christians push rags into their mouth. That is the problem we now face in the society”<sup>214</sup>. Similar views have been expressed by other traditional religious believers.

To some others the rite has lost its significance and ought to be abolished. One of those who hold this view, a woman, told me that: “For me that rite has lost its significance. Women even with children are now going through a rite that was meant for virgins.” The important thing, she suggested, “is for the young woman to help the husband-to-be to prepare for their marriage rite instead of these double expenditures.”<sup>215</sup> Such people are of the view that the rite has good intentions but has lost its significance in contemporary society and ought, therefore, to be abolished. A few suggested that the rite could be combined with the rite of Confirmation, and performed for the young woman at the time of Confirmation.

Some of the young women would not want to use beads belonging to some of their *tasis* (paternal aunts). This is because, it is claimed, the *tasis* have been transferring witchcraft to initiands through the beads that are put on them by some of the *tasis*. No particular evidence or proof of this was given to the researcher about the claim. Three young women said they did not take the beads of their *tasis*. Two of the

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<sup>213</sup> Tɔgbe Kofi Tosa, Nyangbo, 29th March, 1997, op cit.

<sup>214</sup> Ibid.

<sup>215</sup> Name withheld, according to the wish of the interviewee.

women were sisters, suspecting the same *tasi* of being a witch. They, however, accepted beads from their *nɔga* (maternal aunt). When I asked one of them about how she got the information that her *tasi* was a witch, she told me rather reservedly: “Sister, if I told you of the circumstances under which my daughter died, you would believe what I am telling you that this woman is a witch.” She confided in me the “circumstances”, adding that all along people had been suspicious of this *tasi*, but she could not believe the suspicions “until that thing happened to my daughter”.<sup>216</sup> Such allegations are difficult to prove rationally since there is no empirical evidence to examine. Yet one should not be so sceptical as to insist on empirical evidence only as proof of knowledge in such matters! The *tasi* in question seemed to be aware of the suspicion, owing to the attitude of the women towards her. But she looked calm, perhaps for the fact that nobody had openly accused or confronted her about the allegation.

Some of the women who had come of age but were unable to perform the rite felt uneasy when the researcher approached them. Such women have a sense of not being seen as “full women” in the society even though they perform all roles that are expected of them as women. For example, they make funeral and other donations and some are already married with children. All five of such women interviewed confessed that they did not have much self-confidence and esteem, and that they always had the feeling there was something amiss in their life - for not being able to perform the rite. A further plight is that they cannot even dress properly, as they would have wished since they would have to be saving cloths and other things for the performance of the rite. People would question them in subtle ways whenever they dress up in new cloths, for example, whether they are not wasting cloths that should be kept for the rite. *Hesiahi ko la etsi dzodzodzo* - meaning, “one is always full of anxiety”<sup>217</sup>. The fear is also real, of being insulted with such questions as *Ele mumoe tsi kpoa?* - “Have you ever bathed with lime-water?”; *Ede asime kpoa?* - “Have you ever been to market?”, and so on. All such questions are references to some of the ritual practices in the rite that ought to be performed. Those who have not performed

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<sup>216</sup> Names of the said *Tasi* (the witch) and the interviewee withheld, for the sake of confidentiality.

<sup>217</sup> Names of such women withheld, for the sake of confidentiality.

the rite and, therefore, did not go through those processes are, in other words, being told that they are not “women”, for, they have not performed the rite. Such questions are, however, usually only asked of those who want to “show off” in the society. The questions are meant to put them “at their proper place where they belong” .

With all these views about initiation into womanhood, and its clear significance for life and death of a woman, one may wonder why men do not perform any rite to initiate them into adulthood. When I raised the issue, some men said such a rite is not necessary for them, for, the rite is meant for women. One of such men, a chief’s spokesman, had this to say.

Q : Why do you think rites are not performed to initiate boys into adulthood?

A : But boys are not girls! They don’t need such a rite?

Q : Why do girls need such a rite?

A : It is the girls who need to be made attractive for men to marry. And the rite is a way of advertising the young women for marriage. Women do not marry men. It is the men who see them and ask for their hand in marriage. As to whether *tsiami* (chief’s spokesman) thinks the rite has lost its significance since it is now performed not only for the first menstruant but for those even with children, he said that they the men “still feel more comfortable to live with women who have performed the rite irrespective of the time”. This is because a man who has married a woman who has not performed the rite will not be at peace. The rite is a custom that every woman is to perform. The husband of a woman who has not performed the rite would also, therefore, not feel comfortable and will have to help in the performance of the rite. The couple will also not be happy, for, others would be talking about them.<sup>218</sup>

Some of the men also said that men do not need the items like beads, cloths, utensils and the other things that are presented to the women; they do not, therefore, need the rite. And also that it is women who are able to take proper care of homes and children and, therefore, need the education and the equipment that are given to them during the rite. An answer from someone who is not in Ewe-dome but who comes from another part of the country where the rite is performed also for women only is that: “Women are seen as the bearers of the wombs of human beings. They,

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<sup>218</sup> Tsiami Victor Atsu Ganasah, Vane, 12th June, 1997, op cit.



therefore, need the rite in which blessings are given for fertility of the womb”<sup>219</sup>. To mama Theodora Bakudie, “Men do not belong to that category. It is the women who are being equipped for their future (marital) home.”<sup>220</sup>

The views expressed by the people, as one notices, are quite varied. While some Christians, of the E. P. Church of Ghana (and indeed, of some other charismatic Churches in the area, for example, “Deeper Life Church”) see the rite as offensive to their Christian sensitivity, some other Christians do not seem to see the rite as unchristian. Again, while some see the rite as obsolete, as they see it as losing some of the significance that was attached to it, others are defensive of it, seeing it as a rich heritage from the past. Some saw the E. P. Church, Ghana involvement in the rite as simply “cosmetic”. It does not seem to have addressed properly, the concerns of those who are worried about the rite. Others do not worry about that. On the whole one would say that the issues involved are quite complicated. In some cases the difference in opinion seems to be one of denominational differences; as if it is a matter between the E. P. Church of Ghana or other charismatic Churches and the E. P. Church, Ghana. Yet there are some even in the E. P. Church of Ghana who are not happy with the temporary ban that has been placed on the rite, as we noted earlier. The speech of AfenƆ Akoto and some others clearly demonstrated this (cf. p 116 - 117). The rite seems to some, even in the E. P. Church, Ghana, to be obsolete, while others in the same Church are defensive of it.

A careful examination shows the following to be issues (of conflict) that have come out of the interviews. 1. Issues concerning life in the hereafter. 2. Prescribed items in the rite. 3. Issues about witchcraft. 4. Loss of significance in the rite - relating it to the contemporary situation. 5. The community versus individual rights or convictions. These will be taken up in the next chapter.

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<sup>219</sup> Narteh, Accra, 18th June, 1997.

<sup>220</sup> Mama Theodora Bakudie, Vane, 14th April, 1997, op cit.

## Chapter 7

### THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION ON TRADITIONAL RELIGIOUS BELIEFS AND PRACTICES AND THE CHRISTIAN FAITH

#### *7.1. Issues That Have Come Out Of The Rites*

##### *The rite of outdoorizing and naming*

The rite of outdoorizing and naming, we have noted, is an important rite in the life situation of the Ewe-dome. All those interviewed have insisted that the rite is of great importance. It is a rite, according to the people, that has to be performed to rejoice with the parents, to welcome and incorporate the child into the community, to claim paternity for the child, and to put the child under the protection of the Divine, among other things. Both the Christians and the traditional religious believers have accepted the essence of the rite and do perform it in Ewe-dome. There are, however, some differences between the ritual processes that the traditional religious believers and some Christians go through, and those approved by the Church. The main differences that we have noted, have to do with:

1. Making libation to the spirit world, a ritual that is found in the traditional set up - which neither the E. P. Church of Ghana nor the E. P. Church, Ghana accept.
2. The prohibition of the use of alcoholic drinks in the rite by the E. P. Church of Ghana.
3. Various symbolic expressions that were (and are still used by some) to teach moral lessons.

In this chapter, we shall have a theological reflection on the conflicts relating to the practice of making libation and the use of alcoholic drinks in the rite. The issue of using symbolic expressions to teach moral lessons will be taken up in the chapter that has to do with suggestions to the Church with regard to the future of the rites

within the Christian community. Suffice it to state here that the Churches consider them obsolete, even though some in the society would still perform them. These symbols include the use of pepper and salt that are held close to the mouth of the child, meant to teach the child, among other things, the need to work hard for his or her livelihood and to be prepared to face life with its difficulties (pepper) and goodness (salt). A little amount of water is also thrown on to the eaves and a few drops are allowed to fall on to the child who is put on the ground. This is to introduce the child to water and the ground, two very essential elements in life that the child would depend on all the time.

### *7.1.1. Making Libation*

The making of libation, we have pointed out, is an essential ritual in the traditional understanding of life. There is the belief that the dead, even though not seen physically, are still part of the living. The ancestors are still regarded as members of a child's clan. They are present and ought, therefore, be asked to witness and to bless the occasion. The ancestors are, in fact, recognized through libation on many other occasions that are considered important to the community. In the traditional rite of outdooring and naming, the libation prayers usually begin with the name of *Mawu*; though in some areas they are simply began with the invocation of the ancestors. On other occasions such as festivals, in times of epidemic, and difficult arbitrations, the names of *trɔwo* are also included in the libation prayers. Let me once more state, however, that, according to a few of the respondents, the names of spirit beings that are called in an outdooring and naming libation prayer may not be limited to the ancestors only. Other spirit beings could be called upon to witness the occasion.

To the Church, the practice of making the libation is idolatry. It is to give recognition to other deities besides God. "Anybody who engages in that practice cannot be a genuine member of the Church, for, that would mean the person does not understand his or her faith in Christ". That was a statement from one of the pastors of

the E. P. Church of Ghana.<sup>221</sup> And in the current Constitution of the E. P. Church, Ghana, it is stated that:

Persons seeking admission into membership of the Church shall be taught the main differences that exist between traditional life and the Christian life as follows: 1. Traditional life believes in fetishes, spirits, ancestor worship, sooth-saying, juju, oracles, ghosts, witches....2. In the Christian Church, members profess their faith in one person only, Jesus Christ. 3. Belief in Christ dispels all fears associated with traditional gods. 4. New converts shall accordingly be expected to know about Christ who alone shall be the central figure of their new faith, to enable them decide on the difference between their old and new lives. 5. Whosoever shall seek baptism in the name of Jesus, or who shall have been baptized, shall not associate himself with any fetish activities such as customs, food and material things offered for ancestors' graves, funeral celebrations, drumming and dancing, or things of similar nature.<sup>222</sup>

While the Churches make declarations of a non-performance of the rite of libation, some Christians in the area would still not be satisfied with the rite without the act of libation. Thus, the act of libation, in some cases, would be performed before the arrival or after the departure of the Churches' officials from the scene.

#### 7.1.1.1. *A Theological Reflection On The Rite Of Libation*

The rite of libation is not peculiar to the Ewe-dome. It is performed in other parts of Ghana as well on similar occasions like those of the Ewe-dome. The ritual is also performed on some national occasions, for example, as an opening ceremony to welcome visiting dignitaries - to the chagrin of some Christians. Nor is the ritual peculiar to the Ghanaian. It is a rite that is performed by others elsewhere. Ela reports that: "At official receptions in Zaire, for example, the first toast is always proposed in honour of the ancestors and a few drops are poured on the earth where the ancestors lie."<sup>223</sup> In his *African Religions and Philosophy*, Mbiti has also written that: "Libation and the giving of food to the departed are tokens of fellowship, hospitality

<sup>221</sup> Pastor C. W. Gbekor, quoted earlier at page 94.

<sup>222</sup> The Constitution of the Evangelical Presbyterian Church, Ghana and Eglise Evangelique Presbyterienne du Togo, Accra, no date, Lestek Limited, p 31.

<sup>223</sup> Ela Jean-Marc, *My Faith as an African*, P 14

and respect; the drink and food so given are symbols of family continuity and contact".<sup>224</sup>

The issue of conflict between some Christians and others over the ritual of libation is, however, a real one that one would say is found not only in Ewe-dome, but in the Ghanaian society as a whole. It is also perennial. As far back as 1960, it was reported that:

The chairman of the Methodist Church could not accept the validity of the libation prayer at the birth of the Republic of Ghana and therefore would not attend the celebration; but many of the members of his Church were present and entered, in varying degrees, into the spirit of that prayer believing that as well as the all-powerful Nyame [Akan name for God] or God there existed ancestor spirits who were a source of good and able to ward off evil.<sup>225</sup>

And in 1994, an Anglican priest, at a meeting in Takoradi, is said to have made libation when he realised that the person designated for this task was not present. While some were said to have found the act as "progressive and Africanist in essence, others found it objectionable, if not downright scandalous".<sup>226</sup> So that making libation has been an existential problem, a source of conflict over the years, between some Ghanaian Christians and indigenous religious believers and others.

A theological reflection about the situation in this work will be based on the Bible, the basic source of Christian beliefs and practices and then on the traditional beliefs and practices of the Ewe-dome. One concedes the fact that interpretations of some Biblical injunctions can be many and varied. In spite of that one still has to reflect on existential issues that are of concern to the people.

### *The Christian And Making Of Libation*

What does the Bible say about libation, or what biblical principles are there to guide a Christian concerning the practice of libation? To this question, we would say that there are indications in the Bible concerning the practice of libation. One,

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<sup>224</sup> Mbiti John S., *African Religions and Philosophy*, p 9

<sup>225</sup> Bartels F. L., *The Roots of Ghana Methodism*, p 232

<sup>226</sup> Sarpong Peter Kwasi, *Libation*, Accra, Anansesem Publications Limited, 1996, p viii

however, needs to be careful not to make hasty conclusions about the ritual - without first making a careful reading of the texts that are related to the practice.

The first reference to libation or drink offering is found in Genesis 35:14. Jacob was returning home from his self-imposed exile after the covetous sin against his brother Esau. At Bethel, where Jacob had earlier made a promise to God, Jacob “set up a pillar of stone; and poured out a drink offering on it, and poured oil on it”.

Another scriptural text that refers to pouring of libation is Exodus 25: 29. In the instructions given for the making of the table for the bread of the Presence, Moses was told: “And you shall make its plates and dishes for incense, and its flagons and bowls with which to pour libations; of pure gold you shall make them.” Here, it is as if God valued the pouring of the libations so much that the vessels that are to be used in the pouring are to be in “pure gold”. The pouring of libations is, thus, part of the cultic practice of Israel (at the time). In fact in the daily calendar of rituals that are to be performed in Numbers 28, is one that asks for pouring of libation to the Lord. Furthermore, in an act of repentance at the time of the prophet Samuel, the Israelites “gathered at Mizpah, and drew water and poured it out before the Lord, and fasted on that day” (1Samuel 7: 6a). God, in Hosea 9: 4, asked the Israelites no longer to pour libation or make some other rituals to Him, for, the Israelites had forsaken Him and turned to other gods.

Coming to the New Testament, one may say that even though there are no specific texts that point explicitly to the cultic practice of libation, there are few texts that allude to the practice, as found in the Old Testament. Paul’s statement in Philippians 2:17, for example, alludes to the practice of pouring libation when he says, “Even if I am to be poured as a libation upon the sacrificial offering of your faith, I am glad and rejoice with you all”. Paul, certainly, was aware of the ritual of libation and was alluding to it. Paul, in this case, would not mind his very life being poured out, in other words, he would not mind whatever happened to him so long as it was for the sake of the Gospel about God and Christ.

From the above indications (and some others that we have not quoted), we can say that the ritual of pouring libation was part of Israelite cultic practice. The ritual of libation was, however, to be made to Yahweh (God) alone. The cultic



sacrificial practice of libation is, however, not found in the New Testament. Christ, in the New Testament, is regarded as one who has come to fulfil all of such sacrificial rites of the Old Testament. Hebrews 9: 9-12, for example, puts it that:

According to this arrangement, gifts and sacrifices are offered which cannot perfect the conscience of the worshiper, but deal only with food and drink and various ablutions...But when Christ appeared as a high priest of the good things that have come, then through the greater and more perfect tent...he entered once for all into the Holy Place, taking not the blood of goats and calves but his own blood, thus securing an eternal redemption.

It appears from such scriptural texts that sacrifices with drinks, animals and other forms of gifts are no more necessary for those who accept the faith about Jesus Christ.

To some, libation in the African context is seen as an act of rekindling kinship relationships between the living and the dead - in this case where libation is made specifically to the ancestors. Mbiti's statement that we have earlier quoted, for example, seems to give that kind of impression - that the libation and food that are given to the departed are tokens of fellowship, hospitality and respect; the drink and food so given are symbols of family continuity and contact. Libation, in this sense, appears to be more of respect and hospitality to the ancestors (the living-dead as Mbiti calls them) than of anything else. Sarpong has also observed and made the suggestion that:

The dead are honoured in many other ways; flowers are put on their tombs, their pictures may be decorated, something they held dear may be kept in the family to remind the family of them and so on and so forth....If these acts are not considered to be religious but are acts of gratitude to remind the living of people who have meant something to the society in the past, then it would appear that on public occasions, it would be quite permissible to pour libation, mentioning the ancestors.<sup>227</sup>

Such observations or suggestions seem to give the impression that libation may not be an idolatrous ritual, of giving recognition to other powers besides God, the way some Christians see libation. Some other African Christian scholars have, in fact, expended much energy trying to explain to "the powers that be" that Africans regard

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<sup>227</sup> Ibid., p viii.

their ancestors not as deities that are worshipped, but as kinsmen/women with whom they (the living) “continue to live”<sup>228</sup>; that the ancestors are not worshipped but are only venerated; that the ancestors, even though dead, are still part of the living, supervising conduct since they are still concerned about the welfare of those they have left behind in the flesh, and so on. The plea of the theologians (which has so far yielded little progress) is that, the Church should give a public recognition, perhaps in its doctrinal formulations, to the beliefs and practices that are associated with African ancestorhood. Ela, for example, raises the question: “Shouldn’t the Church profit by encouraging African Christians to stay in contact with their loved ones who have left this life, rather than by attacking our ideas about the ancestors?”<sup>229</sup> He further asks:

Can we be at peace with our conscience, if conversion requires that we live separated from the dead of our family, without any possibility of contacting them in the periods of crisis? What new kind of people does God want to construct among us out of our unique African traits? Isn’t communion with the ancestors a mark of our culture?<sup>230</sup>

Mercy Oduyoye also writes: “Why is the relationship of the African with ‘the living dead’ any more idolatrous than the observance of All Souls Day and All Saints Day?”<sup>231</sup> And to Fashole-Luke:

From the outset of Christian missions in Africa, western missionaries unanimously rejected African ancestor cults as pagan superstition, and even the Roman Catholic Church, which has a cult of saints, has forbidden her converts from participation in the rituals of the ancestral cults. It is not surprising therefore, that it was and still is, at this point that Christianity has met with the stiffest resistance in Africa.<sup>232</sup>

To some of the Christian theologians, the African ought to be allowed to continue living with his or her dead. Should the pleas be accepted, then the question that is

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<sup>228</sup> Baeta C. G., “The Challenge of African Culture for the Christian Church and the Christian Message to African Culture”, quoted in Bediako Kwame, *Christianity in Africa: The Renewal of a Non-western Religion*, Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press Ltd., 1995, p 216.

<sup>229</sup> Ela Jean-Marc, *My Faith as an African*, p13

<sup>230</sup> Ibid., p 31

<sup>231</sup> Oduyoye Mercy, *Hearing and Knowing: Theological Reflections on Christianity in Africa*, Maryknoll, New York, Orbis Books, 1986, p 9.

<sup>232</sup> Fashole-Luke E. W., “Ancestor veneration and the communion of saints” in Glasswell M. E. & Fashole-Luke E. W., *New Testament Christianity for Africa and the world: Essays in Honour of Harry Sawyerr*, London, SPCK, 1974, p 209

still left unanswered is this: In what practical ways are the African Christians to recognize the presence of the dead in their lives? How is the African Christian to “contact them (*the ancestors*) in periods of crisis” and what is the implication of the contact? Should making libation, a way of relating to the dead in Ewe-dome, for example, as understood by the people, be accepted by Christians as a way of relating or living with the dead?

To attempt to answer such questions, let us start with the whole idea of the kind of relationship that is believed to exist between the living and the dead. The idea of the kind of relationship that should or is believed to exist between the living and the dead, one would say, has remained a controversy among various groups of people over the years. Various opinions prevail, which can be put into two main classes: 1. The view that there should be no relationship whatsoever with the dead. 2. The view that some sort of relationship can be maintained with the ancestors.

To the Ewe-dome traditional religious believer, in common with some elsewhere, and as discussed earlier, death does not mark the total end of a human being. It only serves as a means by which the dead are transported into another realm of a spirit world, where life continues as it used to be here on earth. The dead do not also cut off their kinship relationship with the living and through food and libation, that kinship relationship is always rekindled.

Christians also believe that life that is lived at present on earth is not all that is to what it means to live in-Christ. There is the expectation of another kind of life after death. The notions about the kind of life that exists or would exist after death, however, vary from one Christian Church or sect to the other.

The Roman Catholic Church, for example, holds the belief that the Church comprises: 1. The Triumphant. 2. The suffering in purgatory (The Church Expectant) 3. The Church militant, on earth.

Those in the first group, that is, The Church Triumphant, are those saints who by their faith and life in-Christ, were able to attain salvation; and after their death, have entered heaven, in union with Christ. The members of the Church Triumphant “have attained the Beatific Vision and do not need our help but we should seek their

intercession and also venerate them as lovers of God eternally united to Him....”<sup>233</sup> Intercessory prayers can be passed through this category of the dead, for them to intercede on behalf of the living and those in purgatory.

The second group, those in purgatory, are those dead who were not able to live to satisfaction, the life that was required of them as Christians, or were not able to perform penance to satisfaction, that is, they have the guilt of venial sin or still owe atonement for past sins. Such souls are believed to be in a state of purgatory - not on earth and not yet in heaven - and for whom there is the need for intercessory prayers. In other words, it is believed that “the Faithful on earth and the Blessed in heaven can by their intercession assist the souls in purgatory”.<sup>234</sup>

The third category, the Church Militant or the Church on earth, are the living Christians, those striving to achieve God’s own perfect way through Christ while on earth.

The Roman Catholic Church believes that: “The souls of the Church Militant on earth, suffering in purgatory and Triumphant in heaven are all united with each other through their union of love with Christ, the source of holiness”.<sup>235</sup> This belief is based on, for example, “Christ’s teaching of the Vine and its branches (cf. John 15: 1-10), on his efficacious prayer at the Last Supper that all united with him might be united together even as he himself was with the Father”.<sup>236</sup>

The concept of the Communion of Saints does not lend itself to only one interpretation. However, the most widely held understanding of it is that it refers to the fellowship of the faithful, the living as well as the departed, irrespective of denomination.<sup>237</sup> It is this belief that is, in fact, incorporated in the Apostles’ Creed. So that there is a belief in an everlasting relationship between all faithful Christians, the living as well as the dead.

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<sup>233</sup> Quilan David, *Roman Catholicism*, London, The University Press, 1966, p 134. Further explanations on the Roman Catholic beliefs about the state of the dead were given me by Rev.Father Gakpe-Ntsri Theodore, of St. Peter’s Seminary, Cape Coast, 14th May, 1997 (No. 27 under Bibliography).

<sup>234</sup> Ibid., p 132

<sup>235</sup> Ibid.

<sup>236</sup> Ibid.

<sup>237</sup> For further reading on the concept of “Communion of saints” refer, for example, to Barth Karl, *Dogmatics in outline*, London, 1960 : especially p 144

The Church Triumphant is to be venerated for their love of God. "This veneration lawfully includes reverence for their relics even as we show honour to the bodily remains of our beloved dead".<sup>238</sup> Reference is made to Exodus 13: 9, for example, to support the belief, that is, that the Israelites were asked by Joseph to bear his bones with them on their way back home from Egypt. Roman Catholics are, however, warned that a relic should not be seen superstitiously as "a magic talisman" for the relic itself or its likeness "is not a source of spiritual power. Every superstitious tendency that suggests they are sources of spiritual power, should be resisted".<sup>239</sup>

We can put the Roman Catholic Church under our second category, of those who believe that some sort of relationship can be maintained between the living and the dead, but not a worship-dependence relationship.

Some other Christian Churches, for example, the E. P. Churches in Ewe-dome, do not hold the beliefs of the Roman Catholic Church. To these Churches, the dead are "asleep" awaiting the final day of resurrection. They make reference to texts like 1Thessalonians 4: 14; 1Corinthians 15: 20. We have already indicated the clauses relating to the spirit powers (including the dead), as found in the Constitution of the E. P. Church, Ghana. Other clauses state that: "The Church shall be fully committed in the event of the death of a member. Members shall mourn with the bereaved family, comfort them, and give them every assistance. However, 'pagan' practices of all kinds shall be abhorred during death and burials"<sup>240</sup>. The 'pagan' practices have not been explained further in the Constitution, but judging from the earlier clauses and the Church's beliefs and practices, they can be taken to include pouring of libation to the dead. Memorial services can be organized for those who so desire, but no other practice or belief in the continuity of kinship relationship between the living and the dead is encouraged. The E. P. Churches in Ghana can be put in the first category, that is, of those who hold the view that there should be no continued relationship between the living and the dead.

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<sup>238</sup> Quilan David, *Roman Catholicism*, p 134

<sup>239</sup> Ibid.

<sup>240</sup> The Constitution of the Evangelical Presbyterian Church, Ghana and The Evangelique Presbyterian Du Togo, Accra, p 46

It is not easy drawing a line on whether one or the other of the categories should be accepted or rejected. Kwame Bediako's theological position on the issue seems to give an answer to the Ewe-dome situation. I shall quote his reflection extensively in order to get a clear insight into what he is saying. He writes that the coming of Christ has affected the "nature and destiny of man".

We have known the ancestors. They have lived among us. Because they know us and are our fathers, they care for us. It is simply an extension of the filial relationship in life. Behind this may lie social organization, the solidarity of the family, the concept that the family continues through death. The dead are alive. Because they know us they are the best guarantee of our security.<sup>241</sup>

Bediako then asks: "What then happens when Christ comes?" And in answer to the question, he further writes:

The nature and destiny of man is affected here. The ancestors were mere men. They did not come from above. Jesus said, "I am from above, you are from below". So Christology from above is valid. But what kind of Christology deals with fears of what the ancestor might do and also with the belief that he is a source of blessing? In terms of Christology the ancestor ultimately cannot be a source of blessing. Because Jesus has come, history is significant and important. The revelation of God in Christ creates a new history. We are brought into a new history. Salvation history becomes our history, because of faith in Christ. So once Christ has come the ancestors are cut off as the means of blessing for we lay our power lines differently. Blessing comes from Christ. Our concern with ancestors and their concern with us has to do with social organization. We can now alter our relationship with them. They simply become members of the community. We may even include them in our intercessions.<sup>242</sup>

Earlier, Bediako said also that "Ancestors themselves need to be saved, so how can they have control over us?"<sup>243</sup> Bediako, in his further exposition, adds, however, that:

Suppose my father who has gone ahead is in the hands of God. I can rejoice and every now and then I can address him through Christ. Not that I will hear something back. But if God so desires and chooses he may give me a message from my father because he knows what my father means to me. If Jesus knows that the only way he will speak to me or get through to me is through my father, he will give me a word from my father. I am willing to let him do that and open myself to that; but on the understanding that I am now in Christ

<sup>241</sup> Bediako Kwame, "Biblical Christologies in the context of African Traditional Religions" in Samuel Vinay and Sugden Chris, (eds.), *Sharing Jesus in the Two Thirds World*, Bangalore, Partnership in Mission-Asia, 1983, pp 164 - 165

<sup>242</sup> Ibid., p165 -166

<sup>243</sup> Ibid., p 164



and I do not depend upon my father for power any more apart from complete dependence on Christ as a source of power and blessing.<sup>244</sup>

To open oneself to dependence on one's father, Bediako reiterates, is to enter into "the realm of the occult".<sup>245</sup>

Bediako seems to have said it all for the Ewe-dome E. P. Church Christian; even though some of the Christians may, however, not understand what he means by the opening up to listen to messages from their ancestors, messages that are coming from Christ. How is the opening up to be done in order to receive messages through the ancestors (even if the messages are from Christ), is a question that some would still ask him. Bediako has not fully released the Ewe-dome Christian out of the difficulty. The question of what kind of relationship should exist, between the living and the dead or how the living would "address him" (the ancestor) even if "through Christ", is still left unanswered.

It seems to me that the issue is a difficult one. This is because the concept about the state of the dead is one of the difficult concepts, not stated explicitly in the Bible. In fact, the Bible is almost silent on the state of the dead. In the Old Testament writings, the dead were believed to have entered "sheol", an underworld - a place of uncertain existence (cf. for example, Job 26: 6; Psalm 9: 17). Coming to the New Testament, we may talk of an almost different concept of a place where the dead go. In the classical example of Jesus' parable of the rich man and Lazarus (Luke 16: 19-31), the rich man is pictured as being tormented in "Hades", but able to see in the distance, Abraham with Lazarus - the poor man - by his side. Biblical interpretation has it that even though Hades, in the above parable, seems to be a place of punishment for the wicked, "the Hades in which the rich man is in torment may be regarded as merely a general term for the abode of all the dead, even though 'a great chasm' (16: 26) separates him from the other part of Hades where Lazarus is in Abraham's bosom".<sup>246</sup> The impression here is that Hades is a place for the dead but it is divided between the wicked and the righteous.

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<sup>244</sup> Ibid., p 166

<sup>245</sup> Ibid.

<sup>246</sup> Miller S. Madeleine & Miller J. Lane, (eds.), *Black's Bible Dictionary*, London, Adam & Charles Black, 8th edition, 1973, p 886

Later development refers to the place of the dead as heaven and hell. At the end of time - according to the Bible - those who have lived good lives (in-Christ) would be rewarded with an everlasting peace in heaven while the evil ones would be condemned to a hell of fire (1Corinthians 15: 52-53). In the mean time all souls who live a life in-Christ are described as having "fallen asleep" (1Thessalonians 4: 14; 1Corinthians 15: 20), awaiting the end of time and the resurrection. The kind of "sleep" that the dead are having after death is not easy to tell. According to Biblical exegesis, "To die is for the Christian to be with his Lord".<sup>247</sup> Those who through no fault of theirs could not know about Christ, for example, those who lived before his historical time, would be judged by God according to God's own gracious plans and standards.

It seems to me that the kind of life that may go on after death, that is, between death and the final day of resurrection, for a Christian, (and hence a Christian's knowledge of how the living should relate to the dead) is one of the secrets that God has decided to keep out of the reach of believers at least up to this time in the history of human beings. One would suggest that the two extremes, of totally rejecting any kind of relationship between the living and the dead or accepting ancestral rituals in their entirety may not be good enough for the Christian. This is because there is on the one hand, at least some ontological bond between the living and the dead that cannot be wished away. So some kind of relationship will have to be maintained. Precisely what it should be is the problem. On the other hand, there are some ancestral practices that may be offensive to Christian sensitivity. For example, praying to them and asking them to perform certain acts for the living undermines the sufficiency of God, through Christ, to provide human beings with their needs. One needs to be reminded that the libation prayers directed to the ancestors, according to those praying, are meant for the ancestors to act. As one of my informants told me: "If anyone loses something and pours libation to the ancestors to help in finding the item, then the person is asking the ancestors to help in finding the lost item".<sup>248</sup> In

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<sup>247</sup> Neil William, *The Moffat New Testament Commentary: The Epistle of Paul to the Thessalonians*, Hodder and Stoughton, 1950, p 94

<sup>248</sup> This was expressed by Afet Adzewoda Deh, Traditional Religious believer, Kpandu, 20th April, 1997, (No. 23 in the Bibliography).

other words, the prayer is meant for the ancestors, not to be passed on to God. So that the Ewe-dome situation is not like what happens elsewhere when:

sacrifices and offerings are directed to one or more of the following: God, spirits and living-dead. Recipients in the second and third categories are regarded as intermediaries between God and men, so that God is the ultimate Recipient whether or not the worshippers are aware of that.<sup>249</sup>

Those making libation prayers to the ancestors in Ewe-dome are aware and know in their minds that the libation prayers that are made to the ancestors are meant for the ancestors to act, not to be carried over to God. I agree with Bediako that blessings, the kinds that the religious believers are expecting, come from Christ. The ancestors would be happy to see their kinsmen and women being blessed by Christ, a blessing they know is not from them but from Christ.

It seems to me that the Church may have a relationship between the living and the dead in which the living can fondly remember their dead, especially on important family occasions such as outdooring and naming, marriage, funerals and so on. The family or Church can recall and acknowledge their good lives and work in the family, Church, community, nation and thank God for them and ask Him to bless them. They may ask God, not the dead, to give them grace to emulate the good examples of the dead; or to be inspired by their good principles. As a cloud of witnesses, the lives (good lives) of the ancestors can serve as examples for the living to emulate. The Christian life, the believers know, is a mystical union that begins with birth and baptism, lasting through life and through eternity. It cannot be cut off by death. Relationships between a dead Christian and the living cannot, therefore, be cut off completely by death.

Having said that, I would, however, say that I am not very clear in my mind as to what Bediako means by “I can address him [*the ancestor (sic)*] through Christ”. How is the address to be made to the ancestors (even if through Christ)? one would still ask.

Coming back to the issue of making libation, some may suggest that the libation could be made but this time to God only, through Christ - libation prayers

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<sup>249</sup> Mbiti John S., *African Religions and Philosophy*, p 58

being seen as the African way of praying. In other words, it could be seen as a process of inculturation, making use of an African way of praying, to pray to God.

That suggestion seems good, in particular when we relate it to the idea of inculturating the Gospel in Africa. But it also raises some aesthetic and other practical issues that cannot be separated from any serious form of theological reflection in contemporary society. Where would the libation be made in the chapels, the usual places of worship ( sometimes tiled, cemented or even carpeted), during the frequent times of prayer, some of the prayers which also sometimes come extempore one may ask. [This is not the same as saying that Christians do not or cannot worship sometimes at open places]. One may note that making the libation in contemporary life, even in homes with those facilities, is becoming a problem. The traditional religious believer does not worship in chapels, but at open places or shrines where the earth is readily available to absorb the liquid that is poured on it. [This is also not the same as saying that some traditional religious believers are not, in these days, living in homes that are tiled, cemented, or carpeted, or that some Christians are not living in homes without those facilities]. Does the Christian then need to go back to a form of worship that was convenient at times when floors were not cemented or tiled or carpeted, in order to satisfy a particular mode of worshipping God - even if God is prepared to accept other forms of worship according to the contemporary situation? In other words, does God need to be worshipped only, in the name of inculturation, through a particular mode of worship, even if the mode is no longer convenient in the contemporary life situation? Surely, God, though He is the same today, as He was yesterday and will be tomorrow, is at the same time, a dynamic God who works in different situations in historic times. He will, therefore, accept worship in forms that are suitable to the contemporary situation. It appears also that God no longer needs practices dealing with food and drinks "which cannot perfect the conscience of the worshipper" and for which reason, among others, Jesus Christ was sent down to fulfil cultic practices of the Old Testament.

We have agreed with Shorter in our Introductory Chapter that inculturation is an on-going dialogue between faith and culture or cultures; a creative and dynamic relationship that cannot be a once-and-for-all event. Material life in Ewe-dome or

African societies (which also affects the spiritual and vice-versa) in the 1990s is not entirely the same as it was in the 1890s. It has undergone changes through external influences as well as internal dynamics. The Ewe-dome in contemporary society who is living in cemented or even carpeted homes in the 1990s, or worships at such places, would find it difficult making libation to God, unlike the Ewe-dome of the 1890s who could make the libation on floors that could easily absorb the drinks. So that where God is prepared to accept different modes of worship, one need not worry about adopting a particular mode only (in the name of inculturation) even if the mode is not suitable to the worshipper in the contemporary situation.

One thinks that Christians by all means should remember the dead through, for example, the kind of suggestions made above namely: remembering them on public occasions, praying for them and asking God's blessings for them and the living, asking God to let the living see the dead as a cloud of witnesses whose exemplary lives could inspire those of the living, putting flowers on their graves, and so on.

It may not always be possible for those who do not accept the ritual of libation to shun the company of a kinsman/woman or others who want to perform the ritual. One can be present and use the time to pray according to one's own faith. One's Lord, at that time, is looking at the heart more than anything else. One can then, later, try to "win" the "pagan" to one's faith, remembering that conversion to the Christian faith is by God's own grace through the humble witnessing through word and deed of Christian believers. Indeed, the Bible does not limit idolatry to giving recognition to other spirit beings besides God, for, such acts as immorality, evil desires, covetousness, among others, are also regarded as idolatrous (cf. Colossians 3: 5).

So that with deep theological reflection, the kind of uneasy tolerance or intolerance that is found among the people over the act of libation, among other things, one will think, could be eased.

#### *7.1.2. The issue concerning the Christian and the use of alcohol*

The use of alcoholic drinks in the performance of the rite of outdoorings and naming is another source of controversy among some members of the Church and others in Ewe-dome. Sometimes, this extends to the use of alcohol in general by Christians.

The use of alcoholic drinks features greatly in many cultural practices of Ewe-dome and in other parts of the country. The common drink is palm-wine. Other drinks such as Schnapps, Gin, Brandy, Whisky and *Akpeteshi* (a locally brewed liquor) are also used. It is alcoholic drinks that are usually used in making libation to the supernatural world, among other things. We have already discussed the tension between some Christians and others over the making of libation.

To the E. P. Church of Ghana, the issue is not only that of making libation; as a principle, the use of alcoholic drinks is also to be avoided by the Church. There is nothing in the rules or Constitution of the E. P. Church of Ghana that states categorically, the non-use of alcoholic drink. However, the use of alcoholic drinks is vigorously preached against. The regulations for the avoidance of alcoholic drinks are based on Biblical texts some of which have already been quoted (see page 113.). It was also explained that some people with problems come to the Church in order to be healed through prayers and by the grace of Jesus Christ. Once delivered, it is not good for them to start drinking again, otherwise, there will be a relapse in the condition from which they have been saved. For the sake of these weaker ones, therefore, the Church does not allow the use of alcoholic drinks.

To some of the people, these explanations are very good. To some others, however, the Church is simply demanding too much from the people. Those who disagree with the Church on its stand do so on the grounds that: 1. Total abstinence from alcoholic drinks is not commanded in the Bible. 2. The fact that some people do suffer from alcoholic problems does not mean that all others must be asked to abstain from the use of alcoholic drinks. Thus, there is a kind of tension over the use of alcoholic drinks.

We will at this point state that the stand of the E. P. Church of Ghana on non-use of alcoholic drinks is not peculiar to that Church. The tendency to ban the use of alcoholic drinks by some other Churches could be traced as far back to the 19th



century Evangelical revival in Britain and the USA and pietism in Germany. As Soper put it: "By the end of the nineteenth century, evangelicals in large numbers believed that alcohol lay at the root of American and British social problems."<sup>250</sup> These developments included a strong movement to ban the use of alcoholic drink among Christians. This was particularly so with the establishment of the Methodist Church which made abstinence from alcohol a condition of membership both in the United Kingdom and in the United States of America. The Second Awakening in the United States of America that began about 1800 reinforced this among a majority of Evangelical Protestants. This was a new development and was at least partly to be explained by the social conditions in newly industrialized Britain and on the violent frontier society of the United States of America. Drunkenness was seen as a contributing factor to the violence and there were, therefore, movements to make members of the Christian Church abstain from alcohol. Some also chose to abstain from alcohol just as monks and nuns abstained from sexual relations. It should be noted that the Protestant Churches of Ghana were founded by the Protestant missionary movements of the 19th century, which were also profoundly shaped by the Evangelical revival we have talked about. Apart from the local experiences of the Churches in Ghana, one may say that the tendency to ban the use of alcoholic drinks may be traced to the Evangelical revival movements of their predecessors.

#### *A Theological Reflection on the use of Alcohol*

A theological reflection on the issue will again be based on scriptures. There are several biblical passages that have to do with the use of wine, and those that point to a condemnation of drunkenness. In other words, total abstinence from alcoholic drinks is not explicitly stated in the Bible, even though drunkenness is explicitly condemned.

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<sup>250</sup> Soper Christopher J., *Evangelical Christianity in the United States and Great Britain*, Basingstone, Macmillan, 1994 p 63.

Viticulture, we are told, “is one of the oldest forms of agriculture”<sup>251</sup> in Israel. Vines were said to be planted in terraced hillsides and during harvest time, “the vine-grower, and probably his family as well, would live in booths or watch-towers in the vineyard”. New wine, it is said, could be drunk immediately, but it was usually allowed to ferment and was stored in wine-skins made from the skins of goats or oxen.<sup>252</sup>

Wine, on the one hand, is regarded, in the biblical writings, as a source of well-being, coming from God; while on the other hand, it could also be a source of evil, with particular reference to drunkenness. Thus, there are passages that indicate the value of wine and others that explicitly condemn drunkenness because it is a source of evil.

A scriptural text that points to wine being seen as a source of well-being is Ps. 104: 14-15 which states that:

Thou dost cause the grass to grow for the cattle,  
and plants for man to cultivate,  
That he may bring forth food from the earth,  
and wine to gladden the heart of man,  
Oil to make his face shine,  
and bread to strengthen man’s heart.

It is clear from the above verses that wine is seen as one of the many good things made by God for the use of man and woman. It is symbolically used to indicate God’s blessing (Gen. 27:28).

John 2: 1-11 is also a passage that indicates the usefulness of wine to the people. Wine, usually used among other forms of food on festive occasions, was also being used at this particular marriage feast, in which Jesus participated. As the host ran out of wine, Jesus miraculously saved the embarrassing situation by turning water into wine.

Furthermore, Paul, in 1 Timothy 5: 23, advises Timothy that he should “No longer drink water, but use a little wine for the sake of your stomach and your

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<sup>251</sup> Brown Colin, (ed.), *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, Volume 3, Michigan, The Zondervan Corporation, 1978, p 918

<sup>252</sup> Walton Robert C., (ed.), *A Source Book of the Bible for Teachers*, London, SCM Press Ltd, 1970, P 359

frequent ailments.” The inference from the passage is that Paul was recommending the medicinal value of wine (a little) to Timothy.

On the other hand, there are also various passages in the scriptures that point to the dangers that wine could cause out of drunkenness and for which drunkenness is explicitly condemned in the scriptures. Noah was condemned for his drunkenness (Gen. 9: 20-27; cf. 19: 32-35) which made him lay uncovered in his tent and did what was undesirable. Isaiah 28: 7-8 also condemns those who should have known better, that is, the priests and prophets, who, instead “reel with wine and stagger with strong drink....They err in vision, they stumble in giving judgement”.

Furthermore, in Hosea 4: 11, it is stated that “Wine and new wine take away the understanding.” Rulers forget the law and ignore the rights of people in need when they get drunk (Prov. 31: 4-5). And in Ephesians 5: 18 is the teaching that “And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery; but be filled with the Spirit”.

Thus, there are scriptural indications that point to the use of wine and some that categorically condemn drunkenness. It can be concluded from the biblical teaching that wine in itself is one of God’s gifts to human kind, and is seen as a sign of God’s blessing. Wine can, however, produce evil consequences if it is not used wisely. It is to be noted that in the Bible the word “wine” is used to mean “wine”. Where the reference is to grape juice, as in Gen. 40:11, it is referred to as such. However, drunkenness was unequivocally condemned because of the harm it can cause: for example, dulling the mind (Isa. 28: 7; Pro. 31: 4-5); leading to disgraceful behaviour as did Noah and Lot (Gen. 9:21; 19: 30-38); and causing poverty (Prov. 23:21). For the above or other reasons, there are examples of abstinence in the Bible, for instance, priests were not to drink before entering the tabernacle to minister (Lev. 10:9); the Nazarites are to separate themselves from wine and strong drink, among other things (Num. 6: 3-5); Daniel and his friends refused the wine and food offered by Nebuchadnezzar (Daniel. 1: 8-16).

From our own empirical evidence, we know that alcohol per se, may not be totally bad, that is, if used wisely, hence some of the drugs that are recommended for use contain certain levels of alcohol, for example, Durol. On the other hand, we also

know of the damaging effects of alcohol in daily lives, for which reason some would advocate for abstention from it. In Radio Ghana's "Tuesday Morning Show" programme, for example, one in which many health issues are discussed, a radio doctor once said that : "Alcohol puts brain cells to sleep, it makes man live a cabbage life, it reduces sperm count in men, it destroys liver cells, it leads to underweight in babies...". So that empirical evidence from contemporary experience shows that excessive use of alcohol or drunkenness can be disastrous.

One may come to the conclusion from biblical writings that there is not a biblical condemnation of all use of alcohol. Undoubtedly, however, drunkenness is unconditionally condemned throughout the scriptures. We would reiterate that alcohol, like any other provision that God has made for human beings on earth, is not totally evil, if used wisely. Things that have been given by God are good; for example, plants (to be used for food and medicine), meat (from fish, animals and their products - for those who use them as such), and drinks. However, each of them, if not used properly, can lead to disastrous consequences. Thus, even though the Church may not serve strong drinks during its various ceremonies (at least for the sake of the weaker brethren), it may also not put a total ban on the use of alcoholic drinks as a general rule.

We would, however, add that if Paul's statements about helping the weak not to fall by what one eats (cf. Rom. 14: 13ff), are found by the Churches to be powerful enough, then, while accepting that the Bible does not insist on total abstention from alcohol, Church members may voluntarily decide to abstain from alcohol. The observation made by pastor Ashigbey of the E. P. Church of Ghana, quoted earlier on page 113, thus, in this case, worth taking note of. It talks about the saving work of Christ in delivering people who come to the Church, out of their alcoholic addiction. For the sake of such weaker brethren, the Church does not allow the use of alcoholic drink; for, "if your brother is being injured by what you eat, you are no longer walking in love. Do not let what you eat cause the ruin of one for whom Christ died". Thus, out of love for the weaker ones, the Church, while knowing that the Bible does not insist on total abstinence, may voluntarily, decide not to use alcoholic drinks during ceremonial occasions.

## 7.2. *Issues that have come out of the rite of initiation into womanhood*

Issues that have come out of the rite of initiation into womanhood and on which we shall have theological reflection are more than those from the rite of outdoorings and naming. These have to do with:

1. Complaints that initiands have witchcraft passed on to them through some items (especially beads) that are presented to them by some of their *tasis* (paternal aunts).
2. Prescribed items in the rite.
3. The acceptance or non-acceptance of women in the society here and the hereafter.
4. Pouring of libation and giving food to the dead. Since we have already discussed this issue in the rite of naming and outdoorings, we shall limit our discussions to the three other issues.

### 1.2.1. *The issue of Witchcraft*

Some of the young women in Ewe-dome complained that the *tasis* (paternal aunts) either pass on witchcraft to some initiands or bewitch them through the beads that are received from the *tasis*. The young women, therefore, do not want their *tasis* to dress them with the beads and the locally woven kente cloth (*Ewedo*), as tradition requires. To address the complaints of the young women, the E. P. Church, Ghana in Vane, for example, has modified the ritual. Female elders of the Church perform the role of the *tasis*, by putting the *Ewedo* around the initiand. The young women would then either use their own beads, or, those who wish, can still use the beads of their *tasis*. There is no longer any compulsion in the use of the beads of a *tasi* as tradition requires.

Some of the *tasis* and some others in the society are, however, not happy about the accusations and the take-over of their role by the Church. One of the *tasis* reported thus: "As if female elders in the Church cannot be witches"<sup>253</sup>. It should be noted that many *tasis* in Ewe-dome are Christians, and the female elders of the Church are also at the same time, *tasis* to some people.

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<sup>253</sup> Name withheld, interviewed on 20th April, 1997.

We have already discussed beliefs about witchcraft. The craft is believed to be acquired through the passing on of such items as beads, headkerchief, and other items that are used close to the skin. It can also be bought, or accidentally picked through food, or given out freely sometimes by paternal aunts (*tasis*) in particular. The craft seems to be something that is passed on, the intention for which has not been explained to the researcher. In Ewe-dome and in many societies, we have noted, it is women who are usually regarded as witches (*adzetwo*). Some men are also regarded as sorcerers, performing similar acts to cause evil in the society. Meyer has made an observation about the accusation of the *tasi* as being a witch when she puts it that:

Because of her position in the patrilineal and patrilocal kinship system, she is thought to be predestined to use witchcraft against her brother's children. Tasi is said to be jealous, because her brothers and their children live in the paternal home whereas she has to stay with her husband's family.<sup>254</sup>

While some of my respondents gave similar explanations, some could not tell why *tasis* in particular are usually accused of possessing witchcraft.

Some have tried to explain away the belief in the existence of witchcraft, as a fantasy, superstition or imagination of the minds of the people, but to the people, witchcraft is a real phenomenon.

Omoyajowo, for example, makes a catalogue of reasons for which people, women in particular, are associated with witchcraft. He writes:

The wife is regarded by her husband's mother as a usurper who has robbed her of the affection of her son, while on the other hand, the wife harbours the feeling that her mother-in-law is making it difficult for her to enjoy the unalloyed love and sympathy of her husband....Thus friction exists between the two women, each accusing the other of wicked deeds and in extreme cases, of witchcraft. If the wife falls sick, she believes that it is her mother-in-law who is bewitching her so that she could have all the love of her (mother's) son for herself....If the husband falls sick, his mother immediately accuses her son's wife for bewitching him.<sup>255</sup>

He continues:

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<sup>254</sup> Meyer Birgit, "If you are a Devil, you are a witch and if you are a witch, you are a Devil': The integration of 'pagan' ideas into the conceptual universe of Ewe Christians in south-eastern Ghana" in *Journal of Religion in Africa*, Volume 22, E. J. Brill, 1992, p 118

<sup>255</sup> Omoyajowo Akin J., "What is witchcraft?" in Ade.Adegbola E. A., (ed.), p 326



In a polygamous house, co-wives are frequently accused of witchcraft. This again has its root in jealousy. Whatever the pleasures that may exist in a polygamous home, there is always absence of peace. The various wives are always vying for the exclusive love of their husband. Accusations of witchcraft by one wife against another are therefore very common<sup>256</sup>.

Old women, Omoyajowo thinks, are accused of witchcraft because people wonder why they live so long. The belief is also out of fear and inadequate medical facilities in the country (Nigeria).<sup>257</sup>

So that to some, especially western trained scholars, jealousies, vindictiveness, quarrels, fantasies, and so on, are some of the things which make people accuse others of practising witchcraft. To the ordinary people, however, witchcraft is a real phenomenon.

#### *7.2.1.1. A Reflection*

It is not easy to give conclusive evidence that witchcraft is real or unreal. This is the case with all beliefs that have to do with supernatural phenomena, for, they cannot be tested by empirical methods. People are known to have confessed to being witches, commonly during trials by ordeal or at the point of death. But some people explain away such confessions through psychological explanations and contending that the confessions are no more than mechanisms employed to disburden their minds from various complexes that they might be suffering from. Other people, however, claim that witchcraft confessions are true and that there is a witchcraft phenomenon. People who hate others, for example, can use the phenomenon of witchcraft to kill those they hate. Those who are usually very rich are believed to have acquired their riches through witchcraft. Sometimes, however, some of those who are regarded as “useless” in the society are also accused to be witches; it is said that they have used their witchcraft to destroy others and that their evil deeds have redounded against themselves, making them lack progress. Some of those seen as very clever are also sometimes accused of witchcraft. Some wonder whether society does not want extremes like being wealthy or poor, or states of serenity or aggressiveness - or

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<sup>256</sup> Ibid.

<sup>257</sup> Ibid.

consider them unnatural - hence the talk of witchcraft as an explanation. Whatever theories people may have, and no matter how sceptical others may be, for the average person there can be no doubt that witchcraft is real and that is what matters.

Among the Ewe-dome, belief in witchcraft is found equally among both adherents of traditional religion and members of the Church. Members of the mainline Churches - like the E. P. Church, Ghana, Methodist Church and the Presbyterian Church of Ghana - generally do not seem to be particularly agitated about the claims concerning witchcraft ( even though individual members of these Churches believe in the existence of the phenomena). In contrast, members of the charismatic Churches seem to be preoccupied with the belief in witchcraft. They constantly organize special exorcism and deliverance services for those oppressed with or possessed by witch spirits or other evil forces. From her research among the Peki-Ewe, Meyer concluded that: "Without the belief in the existence of *Abosam* and the reality of the pre-Christian religious spiritual beings the faith in God - Mawu would be devoid of any basis".<sup>258</sup> She stated further that the fear of the *adzetwo* (witches) "is the reason why so many people feel attracted by Pentecostal groups or the BSPF (*Bible Study and Prayer Fellowships*)".<sup>259</sup> This conclusion by Meyer is not likely to be accepted as wholly true by members of the groups, for, the attraction to Pentecostal or charismatic Churches cannot be said to be solely due to the fear of *Abosam* (name used for the Devil) or of evil spirits or witchcraft. Those who go to such Churches may be doing so for one or other of many possible reasons. For some, it may be because of the manifestation of spiritual gifts like spiritual healing from physical or mental problems. For others, it may be the rendering of exhilarating songs that could be soul-satisfying; or the opportunity to search and know more about God and Christ through intensive Bible studies; or the fostering of a deep sense of fellowship through "cell" or family enrichment programmes.<sup>260</sup> These are not highlighted in the mainline Churches. Meyer may have overstated the matter, nevertheless, she may be making an important point: that the Pentecostal/charismatic

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<sup>258</sup> Meyer Birgit, Ibid., "If you are a devil", op cit., p 120

<sup>259</sup> Ibid.

<sup>260</sup> For further reading about charismatic Churches in Ghana, check, for example, Gifford Paul "Ghana's charismatic Churches" in *Journal of Religion in Africa*, Volume 24, Leiden, E. J., Brill, 1994, p 242

Churches seem to be preoccupied with beliefs about evil spirits in particular, *adzegbɔgbɔwo* (witchcraft).

It seems to us that it will not augur well for the Churches in the area to deny or play down the reality of witchcraft or evil spirits which to many is not in doubt. The lukewarm attitude of the mainline Churches to witchcraft beliefs might be due to some western missionary ideas that were brought to the people, based on western scientific or philosophical notions about the world and existence. We have earlier noted that the missionaries, among other things, considered witchcraft as superstition, imaginations only of the minds of those who hold them. In other words, since the phenomenon cannot be tested scientifically or in empirical ways, the claims of the people were seen only as fantasy. The beliefs and practices of exorcism that were associated with witchcraft were, therefore, to be denied by converts to the Christian faith. But this did not always work. As Meyer noted, the Ewe converts to the Christian faith:

had to make do with the observance of the Church order, prayers, the participation in the Church services, and the Holy Communion. As long as no mishaps occurred and a person fared well, participation in Church activities was enough...However, when Christians faced severe problems which they were unable to solve, they often did not consider the practices entailed by missionary Pietism to be sufficient. In such cases, 'back-sliding into heathendom' occurred.<sup>261</sup>

That was and still is the kind of "dual" life that many of the converts to the Christian faith face in the mainline Churches. The missionaries could not come to terms with the people's spiritual world view and instead of providing a way for overcoming problems that confronted the converts and which they believed to be real experiences with witchcraft, they rather tended to suppress the experiences. It is not by accident, therefore, that at one time or the other, spiritual healing centres sprang up within the Churches. These centres take seriously the reports of the converts about their experiences with evil spirits. Exorcism and other forms of deliverance from the powers of evil spirits are practised at these centres, sometimes to the chagrin of the Churches who would follow only the missionary tradition. It is also not surprising, therefore, that as one reads through the causes of the various schisms in the E. P.

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<sup>261</sup> Meyer Birgit, *Translating the Devil*, p 150.

Church, one would notice a general characteristic of the schismatics starting as prayer, healing or Bible study groups. These are groups that take seriously the experiences of believers and provide means of overcoming the problems.

The fact is that the beliefs and practices about witchcraft are so embedded in the life situation of the people that they could not be laughed out of existence. And the existence of evil spirits is acknowledged in the Bible. Jesus himself, in fact, acknowledged the reality of, and dealt with them (cf. Mark 1: 21ff). The scriptures tell of many activities of Christ casting out evil spirits. So that, we may say, while those who have overcome the belief in the existence of witchcraft or do not believe in its existence need not bother about it, those who believe in its existence may have to follow the way of Jesus Christ as shown in the scriptures. The Church, perhaps, will do better to come to grips with the belief rather than deny or play it down. If in the future, the people perhaps out of scientific unfolding of nature or with better medical facilities, are able to deal away with the belief, then, the Church may not have to worry about the phenomenon any longer. The people themselves will give up the beliefs that are held about witchcraft as they find scientific explanations to be more satisfying. Until then, the Church will have to come to grips with the existential difficulties of the present. The writer agrees with some who do complain that some of the deliverance sessions that are organized by some in the charismatic Churches could be problematic as some begin to see the attendance at these sessions as prerequisite for salvation. Or some are made to feel insecure unless they go to deliverance centres for deliverance from the powers of evil spirits. In other words, some abuses might be coming out of the sessions. The Church would have to be careful about that. Prayers for all in the Church to have the Holy Spirit to overcome evil powers, as well as intensive teaching about the Lordship of Jesus Christ over evil powers, could be part of the Churches' worship activities. In other words, special sessions could be held from time to time during worship to invoke the Holy Spirit to cure persons suffering from oppression by evil spirits in all their manifestations. For, everybody needs prayers for the protection of Christ, and not only the few who go to deliverance centres. Rightly did Lartey put it that:

In Africa, medicine has always been practised by traditional priest-healers. Healing, exorcism, divination, diagnosis and the restoration to wholeness of

ill or disturbed persons are seen as crucial functions of the priest. To the traditional African the most important activity of a priest is the medical one - the ability to diagnose correctly and prescribe accurate remedies for various diseases. To separate this function from his other priestly activities, or to disclaim the authenticity of this as a valid service of a religious person, is to seriously detract from a priest's acceptability and recognition with a traditional African. This appears to be what happened with the Western-founded Churches.<sup>262</sup>

One is not here advocating an adoption or the use of a particular mode of practice of a traditional religious priest, by the Church. The point of contact here is that, indeed, every human person - not only the African traditional religious believer - seeks from religion, (including the Christian religion) the wholeness of life. This includes not only remedies from physical ailments, but also remedies for other ailments that some times defy physical or empirical explanations. The people in the Church (ie., not only traditional religious believers), expect the priest or minister in the Church to show such a concern for their total well-being - indeed, the very kind that the Master-priest Jesus Christ showed to people when he was on earth. Thus, the call for the Church to reconsider its attitude to witchcraft claims may have to be given more attention than it seems to be the case at present.

It is good to say also that even though the Church may get involved in cultural practices that are found to be useful, it should at the same time be very sensitive to accusations of witchcraft that are made against some members of the Church. It is a fact that many of the members of the Church, including female elders, are also *tasis* to some of the young women. Furthermore, a girl who is not a *tasi* today may, in the future, become a *tasi* to somebody. The problem of witchcraft accusations may, therefore, be a never-ending one unless the Church does something about it. To assume that female elders in the Church (who are also in any case *tasis* to some people) are immune to witchcraft possession and, therefore, could take up the roles of *tasis* in the initiation rite is to present "a holier-than-thou" attitude of some over other categories of female *tasis* in the Church. Indeed, it is not unknown that even some leaders in Churches are sometimes accused of witchcraft. All Church members,

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<sup>262</sup> Lartey E. Y., "Healing: Tradition and Pentecostalism in Africa Today", in *International Review of Mission* 75 (January 1986), p 75



therefore, need the teaching and prayers for the power of Christ to overcome evil spirits. The *tasis* need the support and prayers of the Church as much as the girls need them. Furthermore, for the Church to take over the role of the *tasis* because of witchcraft accusations, is to endorse the witchcraft accusations of the young women. So the Church after all, is giving recognition to the very phenomenon that it, at the same time, would want to suppress! This also smacks of taking sides, and, thus, a failure on the part of the Church to love and bring solace to all of its members. All Christians need the grace, love and power of their Saviour and Lord Jesus Christ.

The observations and suggestions above have come out of the Ewe-dome situation, but one would hope that this will be a pointer to other societies, that the Churches need to have a dialogue with custodians of traditional beliefs and practices in the various societies - many of whom usually turn out to be Christians - instead of simply taking over roles and giving them to elders in the Church. Some of such (usually women) do hold some "keys" to the solution of problems relating to traditional usages that are matters of concern to the Churches. There are those who in some societies - not necessarily in Ewe-dome - would make people believe that traditional practices that are performed by the Church are not complete without the traditional touch. Such make some people not feel satisfied with the Churches' performances unless they go back to perform the rites in the traditional way. The Church, therefore, needs to get closer to custodians of traditional norms and rites, pray for them, teach them more on the power of Christ and have a dialogue with them instead of just taking over roles from them. That approach, one may surmise, will bring about better solutions to some of the problems more than the Church may think of solving.

One would also like to take further the issue concerning the use of beads, articles of people worn next to the skin and which are passed on from one person to another over the years. Items worn very close to the skin easily absorb sweat and other bodily secretions. The same beads that are worn by different people over the years could, therefore, accumulate such dirt. The beads, not only those of *tasis*, but also of all others, ideally, ought not be passed on. If they should be passed on, then they have to be cleaned properly, to avoid the production of organisms that could have



adverse effects on those who use them. The Church can, thereafter, pray over them for a spiritual cleansing to take away any bad spiritual influences that may be attached to them. They may then be used, that is, after the prayers. The use of new sets of beads can also be encouraged as it is the case in some cases in Vane, so that initiands may have the chance of using their own beads whenever they so wish. It needs a lot of teaching to the *tasis* as well as the initiands on all issues that are involved so that all in the Church would feel comfortable about cultural practices that are found to be “a rich heritage” to both Church and traditional society.

### 7.2.2. *Prescribed items in the rite*

Some Christian young women could also not understand why there should be a prescription of items in the rite, in particular about the kind of the locally woven cloths that are to be used. The young women think parents or they themselves should be allowed a free hand in the choice of these items. A question was also raised about the kind of stove that is used in the preparation of the festive meal. They suspected that there was a traditional religious belief behind the items hence the prescription.

The prescribed cloths that are to be presented to the initiand are those in Avatime known as *Kotokoto*, *Ntsrim* or *Wadza* and *Kugosa*. The *Kotokoto* and *Ntsrim* cloths are very beautiful multi-coloured thick kente cloths while the *Kugosa* is of same texture but plain white in colour. From my discussions with the people, these cloths were chosen for their thickness, and for the fact that they are handicrafts of the people themselves, made out of the local loom.

### *A Reflection*

I have found the explanations given by the queenmother of Avatime traditional area and some others to be quite reasonable. Avatime is a cold area, lying on a mountainous terrain. The thick cloths, used as cover-cloths, are a good means of keeping warm, especially at night. For their beauty, they could also be used on ceremonial occasions and are, in fact, sometimes used as such. One would add that a

rite is meaningful only if it follows a specific form or manner. A rite ceases to be a rite if each of the candidates involved should decide on what to use or do any time the rite is to be performed. In other words, the formalized nature of a rite adds to its significance. Anyone who observes a rite, and especially one who is familiar with the prescriptions for it, would know the rituals that candidates are expected to go through. Many rites of the various religions, including the Christian faith, as well as other organizations, do follow set forms and orders. The Ewe-dome practice, therefore, is not peculiar. Since there is no traditional religious (unchristian) belief behind the use of the prescribed cloths, one cannot find any justifiable scriptural grounds for rejecting them. Moreover, the need for thick and warm cover cloths for various occasions makes the possession of the prescribed cloths both desirable and justifiable.

On the issue of *Etugu* (three large moulded earthen pieces of stoves) that are used in the preparation of the festive meal, again, the explanation of the custodians of the rite is quite meaningful. It is true that Avatime lies in a rainy zone. The dried and packed *Etugu* can, therefore, be used any time the need arises for their use. The three pieces together also give a solid support for the large pots that are used in the preparation of the festive meal. The writer has witnessed the moulding of some of the stoves, and did not see any traditional spiritual practice associated with them. It has also been agreed that other forms of stoves can be used, provided they are strong enough to carry the heavy pots that are put on them. Christians can, therefore, use the *Etugu* with a clear conscience. Where they are uncertain, they could take advantage of the negotiated compromise and use other strong stoves.

It seems to me that the issue is more of giving satisfactory explanations to the young women as to why the particular items are used in the rite. Once this is done, the minds of the young ones would be set at ease. The problem is that many practices in the traditional set up are for the most part shrouded in too much secrecy or are left unexplained. This leaves room for suspicion and speculation. At this point in time, the custodians of tradition will do well to make things more open and thus, more acceptable to the contemporary generation who are more inquisitive and sometimes more sceptical than their forebears.

*7.2.3. The issue of acceptance/non-acceptance of women in the society here and the hereafter.*

One of the reasons that have been given for the performance of the rite of initiation into womanhood is: To give a social recognition to the young woman as a mature adult in the society. Since society as established on earth, according to traditional beliefs, takes the same form as the one in the hereafter, the acceptance of a woman as a mature adult here on earth would mean her acceptance as such in the hereafter. The Ewe-dome traditionally believe that women who have not performed the rite and have, therefore, not been “fully” accepted in the category of mature women here on earth, would also not be accepted as such in the hereafter. It is for this reason that the rite is performed for women even while laid in state, for those who are not able to perform it before their death.

To some Christians in Ewe-dome, the issue of acceptance in the community in the hereafter, is the primary source of worry about the rite. This is because they do not seem to be clear about the concept of the spirit world of traditional belief. Is the concept of the hereafter in the traditional teaching the same as that of the Christian? Should a Christian go through the rite as a prerequisite for her entry into the hereafter? What is the place of Christ in all these? These are some of the questions that have been raised.<sup>263</sup>

*A Theological Reflection*

The issues that have been raised are tied up with an earlier one that we have discussed, that is, concerning the making of libation to ancestors. What is the state of the dead, and what should be the relationship between the Christian and the dead?

The discussions that we have had on the issue of making libation to the ancestors have given us clues to any discussions that we may have in this case. The state of the dead, in the hereafter, we have noted, is not explicitly stated in the

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<sup>263</sup> Various questions of such nature and how they could be addressed by the Church using Christian principles, were of concern to the Synod Clerk of the E. P. Church of Ghana, the Rt. Rev. V. E. Otitiaku, among others, during my interviews with him; 12th May, 1997 (No. 39 under Bibliography).

biblical scriptures. All that we are told is that the dead are “asleep” in the Lord, awaiting the day of resurrection. Biblical teaching also shows that the dead in-Christ are with the Lord, serving as a cloud of witnesses; their exemplary lives give inspiration to the living. Those who are being saved in-Christ are those who have believed in Jesus Christ and have confessed Him as Saviour and Lord, and who, by God’s grace are walking the Christian path. Others who had lived before the historical time of Jesus Christ would be judged according to God’s own gracious dealing with human beings. Therefore, one may say, the Ewe-dome women who are truly in-Christ would not need to go through such a prescribed rite that is seen as a qualification for entry into a community of women in the hereafter.

One would hasten to note that there are other reasons that are given for the performance of the rite. The rite has the other aims of making merry with those who have come of age and also of equipping the young women for their future (marital) life. It is also meant to educate the young women on the values and norms that are cherished in the society. If the Church has found these commendable and useful to the women, then it could take up the useful aspects as it drops the one it is unable to accept, namely, the rite being seen as a way of making women acceptable in the community of women in the hereafter. This will be similar to what the Church has done with the rite of outdooing and naming when it performs the rite because of the importance that is attached to it, but excludes aspects and rationale that are considered offensive to Christian conscience and sensitivity. The point of difference can be emphasized in a liturgy, as is the case with the rite of initiation through outdooing and naming. Alongside an appropriate liturgy which has to express the Christian understanding and aspiration, has to go adequate teaching that will explain to all the Christians, especially the custodians of customary practices most of whom are also Christians, what it means to be initiated (baptized) into Christ and to die in-Christ.

For the rite to be meaningful, one would further suggest that it needs to be performed at a time that would be meaningful, that is, not performed after a woman is already married and sometimes even has children. Provision should also be made for the education of the young women, (and young men, a case which I have argued

out elsewhere in this thesis, (cf. chapter 8) on the cherished norms in the society, for example, on chastity before marriage, fidelity in marriage, hard work, modesty, and so on. These cherished norms of the society are congruent with Christian values. Indeed, some Churches have been doing that. In some other Churches, however, there has not been much of such organized sessions for the youth in the Church. The aims of teaching cherished norms in the society and of equipping a woman for the future home, can then be upheld by the Church.

It seems to me that the rite of initiation into womanhood, if it is stripped of what is found to be offensive to the Christian faith, can be combined with the marriage rite which the Churches in the area have accepted. Few, in fact, already perform it that way. It will then be seen only as a mother giving basic equipment to her daughter, to supplement what the husband-to-be is expected to give to the wife-to-be, for their future life. It will then be the responsibility of the Churches as an on-going programme to be involved in teaching the youth the norms that are cherished in the society.

It seems to me that setting different times for the rite outside the marriage rite is one of the greatest problems that the young women have to face. There is not much point, for example, in setting a time to announce the maturity of a woman for marriage when she is not ready for marriage, nor is there a point in equipping a woman for a "future" home when she is already married or settled in the future home. The rite becomes meaningless in such cases. At the point of marriage, all would have been better prepared for the items that are needed for the marital home while at the same time the youth would have been taught the cherished norms of the society. Together, therefore, both Church and traditional society will work for a common cause.

This kind of inculturation theology in Ewe-dome, perhaps as elsewhere, can be a difficult venture. This is because the Christian mind seems to have been so set by the missionary practice of denying things that have to do with Traditional Religion, (which to some extent, are also woven into the cultural practices) that even to have theological reflections about them is sometimes seen by some Christians as "a paganistic exercise". In fact, to some Christians, to even mention the words

“culture” or “theology” these days is to be seen as “pagan”. Yet, people are suffering from various kinds of conflicts, the Churches pretending that the conflicts do not exist. The fact that African indigenous spirituality has been woven into cultural practices need not mean that, therefore, all things cultural should be denied. We need to ~~do~~ undertake discreet studies of the various practices and deny only what is unchristian as we take on other values in the culture that are not against Christian faith and practice. The practices should also be constantly evaluated in relation to life in contemporary society. Culture is there for the gospel of Christ to transform, not to be condemned in its entirety. And it is a dynamic process. It is difficult sometimes to remove the non-religious from a cultural practice, and that may have been one of the problems that the early missionaries faced and which some still face today. But the straining is not an impossibility, and also need not be seen as a syncretic exercise. For, to refuse to do that is to deny everything cultural for the African Christian, even where some practices are useful and not against Christian faith. What is of good value and relevant in contemporary life and not against Christian faith and practice can be maintained, while things that are incompatible with the faith or are of no value and relevance in contemporary life can be left out. To do that is to make life more meaningful to Christians in various cultures. Other suggestions to the Church will come in our concluding chapter.



## Chapter 8

### AN ETHICAL REFLECTION ON THE RITES OF BIRTH AND INITIATION INTO WOMANHOOD

I have chosen to engage in an ethical reflection on the rites under discussion, in particular, the rite of initiation into womanhood, because I have found the issues raised in the rites to be not only of theological importance. They have ethical dimensions as well. The ethical dimension has to do with how far the individual can be seen as a person, with certain innate qualities and rights, even in the midst of a society that is conspicuously communal. To what extent can an individual person in Ewe-dome balance her or his life as an individual person who has certain innate (fundamental) rights with the expectations of the society? Has the individual any rights in Ewe-dome society? That was a question we raised in our introductory chapter, which we intend to examine in this chapter. Other issues deal with the relevance/non-relevance of the rite of initiation into womanhood in contemporary times. There will also be some reflection on reasons for the non-performance of a rite by males, to initiate them also into adulthood or malehood. Indeed, an ethical reflection cannot be divorced from any serious theological reflection, for, beliefs and practices are meant to be lived.

Before we can do this kind of reflection, we need to understand the general bases of the rite, some of which have already been indicated in the foregoing description of the practices.

#### *8.1. Presuppositions*

There is the belief in traditional Ewe-dome society that the cosmos came into being through an ultimate God, *Mawu*. Among the creatures of *Mawu* is *amegbetɔ*, a person. A person, unlike the other creatures of *Mawu*, has *Mawu*'s own breath

(*gb*⊃*gb*⊃) in him or her; a property or quality that makes a person a most valuable being of *Mawu*'s own creation. Human life is valued so highly that for every birth, there must be a rite to rejoice with the parents of the child, to thank and lay the child solidly in the care of the Divine, and to incorporate him or her into the society, among other things.

The Ewe-dome have found the rite of outdoorings and naming to be an important one and both Christians and non-Christians go through ritual processes that we have discussed. We have also discussed the area of conflict between Christians and non-Christians.

The child, growing into adulthood, just as in many other societies, is made to feel that physical maturity, which is evidenced in bodily changes, is not sufficient to confer on a person, all the responsibilities and privileges of an adult human being. The young adult (she in this case) needs to go through another rite that will initiate her into the society of adults. It is felt that to be truly mature, the young woman must not only know that she can bear a child; she must also know how to act in various relationships such as to her husband in her marital role, to her children as mother, to the elders, as well as to in-laws. For these roles, she is trained in housewifery. Again, since she will soon become a mother and will be bringing up future members of the society, it is desirable to ensure that she herself knows and appreciates the society's cherished values and norms. In addition, the rite gives her the opportunity to be equipped with a reasonable amount of property or equipment such as clothing and utensils to enable her maintain a certain level of dignity in her new status. All this is realized through the arrangement of the rite of initiation into womanhood. The rite in fact, has the following reasons for its institution:

1. To announce the maturity of a woman.
2. To teach values of the society, especially sexual morality and family life values.
3. To equip the girl for her future (marital) home.
4. To make women acceptable in the community.
5. The rite as a tradition

### 8.1.1. *Reasons for the institution of the rite of initiation into womanhood*

#### *To announce the maturity of a woman*

Many localities in Ewe-dome use the term *gbɔtowɔwɔ* for the rite of initiation into womanhood. The term *gbɔtowɔwɔ*, as we have noted, literally means “living and doing something outside the town”. The usage of the term stems from the fact that in the olden days (and in some homes today, believed to have some spirit powers), a woman in her menstrual period was, and in some cases is still, not to live in a house with others. She ought to live in a specially built hut outside the town. This is because the menstrual blood is believed to have a potency which renders impotent, the working of certain spirit powers. The woman was (and is) also believed to be in a state of defilement, uncleanness or impurity, and would defile things that she comes into contact with. She, therefore, ought to separate herself from all other people.

For the young woman having her first menstruation, it was not only a matter of leaving the house for the reasons given above. The first menstrual period is a sign that the girl is no longer a child but one who is capable of having a child herself. It is a period of movement from childhood to adulthood. This movement is transpersonal; in other words, other members of the community need to know about the stage in which the young woman has entered; hence the institution of the rite of initiation into womanhood, one by which the maturity of a young woman is announced. Like all other African peoples, the Ewe-dome understand the individual as always integrally part of the community. It is a society in which we can say with Mbiti that: “We are, therefore, I am”.<sup>264</sup> The rite, thus, allows the community to participate in the events of one of its members. In contemporary times, however, the first stage of living in specially prepared huts outside the house, we have said, is no longer observed. In other words, the rite is not performed strictly for the first menstruant. It could be several months or even years after the first menstruation before it is performed. The greatest of the factors for the delay is economic. The mother is supposed to sponsor the performance of the rite. Owing to the harsh economic conditions of present-day

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<sup>264</sup> Mbiti John S., *African Religions and philosophy*, p 109

living, the mother may not be able to find the resources for the rite. The young woman, therefore, has to work and help in finding the items that are necessary for the rite. This can take a long time. The rite must, nonetheless, be performed, no matter the age at which it is performed. So that the marking of a transition in the biological sense cannot, at present, be said to be the key issue in the rite of initiation into womanhood. Other reasons have, indeed, been given for the performance of the rite.

*To teach values of the society, especially sexual morality and family life values.*

The period of the celebration of the movement from childhood to adulthood, marked through the rite we are discussing, was also a time meant to teach the women adult values cherished in the society. As reported in Nyangbo area, two months were set aside for the period. During this period, the young women were taught the importance of such values as industry, respect and hospitality, homecraft and sexual morality like chastity, fidelity and self-control. They were also taught basic hygiene of how to take care of themselves, for example, how to bath with *mumɔetsi* (lime-water), so that they would not be offensive to others. The girls came out of the confinement not only looking attractive physically, as they were well fed, but also having developed an inner beauty or disposition that would enable them to manifest the standards that are cherished in the society.

As the girls were expected to be chaste and to have retained their virginity as at the time of the performance of the rite, they would have had to avoid sexual laxity, for instance. This, it is expected, would also prepare them to have a high sense of marital fidelity in later life. In Nyangbo traditional area, the spirit power that is believed to inhabit the mountain which the girls used to climb, could easily "catch" a girl who might have become pregnant or defiled her virginity before the performance of the rite. That kind of exposure was a disgrace not only to the girl, but to parents, family and the whole kinship group. Above all, other rites would have to be performed to remove the impurity and the anger of the spirit power, caused by the immoral conduct of the girl. The whole family was mocked at. Let me point out here that the punishment that was meted out in some other areas in the country to girls who became pregnant before the rite used to be more harsh than that in Ewe-dome.

Among the Krobo, girls who were found to be pregnant before the initiation rite of *Dipo*, together with the men responsible for such abominable pregnancies, were banished from the town. Among the Ashanti, such girls would have to go through a very disgraceful ritual known as *Kyiribra*. Such a ritual included slaughtering of a sheep on the girl “allowing its blood to gush on to the girl’s head and trickle down her body....For the purification to be effective at all, blood should run down the girl’s genitals”.<sup>265</sup> Many of such practices no longer exist in the said societies. Among the Krobo, however, the man, even in contemporary times, who is found to be responsible for making a girl break the *Dipo* rite, is made to bear the expenses of purification rites that would have to be performed in both households.<sup>266</sup> There is no purification rite in Ewe-dome in these days. Needless to say, this is because there is no longer any strict regulation concerning chastity before the performance of the rite. The woman, however, has to go through the rite of initiation into womanhood, no matter her age. Other elements in the rite seem to be crucial.

*To equip the young woman for her future (marital) home.*

The initiand is given a lot of gifts by friends, relations, and in particular, her mother. The gifts include cloths, footwear, beads, jewellery, cooking utensils and money. In Avatime, the rite is rightly termed *Kusakɔkɔ* (giving cloth). The gifts are meant to make the girl into a woman as women need such things in their homes. Mothers would not like their daughters to enter their future (marital) homes “naked” or as wives who would depend solely on the providence of their husbands. Again, as a child, a girl in Ewe-dome usually dresses in one piece of cloth tied or held together under the armpits. As a mature adult, however, she must dress in two pieces of cloth, with an upper dress. Such attire, known as *tadedzi*, using wax prints, are, therefore, provided as gifts to the initiand.

Cooking utensils are also important. A woman in Ewe-dome is expected to cook the meals for the husband and children. A man who frequents the kitchen, let alone does the cooking, is seen as intruding into the domain of the woman, and may

<sup>265</sup> Sarpong Peter, *Girls’ Nubility Rites among the Ashanti*, p 50

<sup>266</sup> Opoku Kofi Asare, *West African Traditional Religion*, p 118.

be a subject of gossip. A woman who goes about buying already cooked food from bars or restaurants or at the road side is regarded as a lazy, extravagant woman, and one who does not know how to cook. Tasty meals are to be prepared from one's own cooking pots. Provision is, therefore, made in the rite for cooking utensils that are to be presented to the young woman.

The rite also serves as an occasion for merry-making for the girl: she is acknowledged as one who had been chaste or respectful up to that stage, and obedient to her parents and others in the society. She is, therefore, showered with many other gifts as she also enjoys the solidarity and generosity of the whole community.

*To make women acceptable in the community, here and the hereafter.*

The society's ideas about the rite of initiation into womanhood are such that to remain without performing it is to remain, in the eyes of the people, a child. In the past, a woman who had not performed the rite, could not play any responsible roles in the community. For example, she could not attend adult meetings, nor could she pay or be given funeral and other donations. Furthermore, she could not be married. These rights, responsibilities and privileges were to be for only those who had performed the rite. In these modern days, however, a woman who is adult in age but who has not performed the rite seems to be accepted in the adult group as she can marry, attend meetings of adults, and is expected to pay funeral and other donations. Let me state, however, that women who are married and bear children and who have not performed the rite feel or are made to feel that they do not truly belong to the adult society. We have heard of the taunting that such women sometimes face from people in the society. Such taunting include questions like *Ele mum=etsi kpoa?* (Have you ever bathed with lime water?) *Ede asime kpoa?* (Have you ever been to market?). As has been stated earlier, during the rites, the initiands are taught how to wash themselves with lime water and to keep personal hygiene. Initiands also have to go to the market place during the week of their initiation to demonstrate publicly that they have reached the stage of womanhood. Thus, the questions may appear to be simply finding out facts. However, they have a deeper meaning, and imply that the one is not



a woman because she has not performed the rite. Such women develop psychological and emotional complexes that tend to lower their self-esteem.

There is a spiritual dimension to the need to be accepted by the community. The life that is lived on this earth is believed to be the exact copy of the one in the hereafter. As such, just as women who have not performed the rite are considered to be not “fully” accepted as women in the society, so also, it is believed, they would not be accepted as women in the society as established over there in the hereafter. This explains why the rite is performed even on their death beds for those who are not able to perform it before their death. Being accepted in the hereafter then appears to be a key element in the performance of the rite.

#### *The rite as a tradition.*

The rite of initiation into womanhood is also performed as part of tradition. Some want it to be performed because they want something stable in a modern world of change. Thus, even though the rite has lost some of the significance that lies behind it, some would still want it to be performed, as part of the cultural heritage.

Thus, by the rite of initiation into womanhood, a young woman is groomed and equipped physically, psychologically and emotionally, socially, spiritually and materially to take her place in the community as a responsible adult member.

### *8.2. An examination of the rite of initiation into womanhood.*

#### *8.2.1. Positive issues in the rite of initiation into womanhood; in its “original” form.*

We have outlined the religious, moral and philosophical reasons for the performance of the rite of initiation into womanhood. The rite of initiation into womanhood has very positive intentions or reasons behind it. The rite had the intention of keeping girls out of sexual immorality - at least until they reach the age of puberty or marriage - since they ought to be chaste at the time of performance of the rite. As a matter of fact, the discontinuation of it in some areas in the country is regarded by some as a major cause of sexual promiscuity in general and in particular, teenage pregnancy, a menace in the Ghanaian society of today.

There is the added positive value that, in the course of their being confined, the young women were taught useful lessons such as housewifery, respect for people, fidelity, and personal hygiene. These are greatly cherished in the society. The rite, thus, helps also in making people to understand and respect their own traditions; guarding them against the temptation to go with every wind of change, or copy blindly what they see from others.

The rite also helps the young women to acquire valuable equipment for their future homes - through gifts that they receive. Women can live comfortably in their homes with those gifts. There is also a lesson of thrift to be learnt; the young women learn to save, as they store up cloths. This may help in later life, as they learn not to squander up things, but make sacrifices for themselves and later in life, for the children. Again, even though divorce is not encouraged in Ewe-dome society, women who may find themselves in divorce situations can come out of it with their own belongings - protected from the threat of their husbands collecting back things that they might have bought for them and, thus, leaving them with nothing.

The rite of initiation into womanhood has also the effect of making the young woman feel truly accepted by her community. Everyone shares a joyful time with her and she now belongs to a group which, for the rest of their lives, have a shared important common experience. Everyone needs a "place to feel at home".<sup>267</sup>

Thus, the rite, if it follows from the motives that lie behind it, will help in giving recognition to the woman as a normal mature person capable of marrying and having children - a state that is valued greatly in Ewe-dome society. The young woman will be full of respect and hospitality. She will also be a woman who is not lax in sexual matters; one who has a sense of dignity as she enjoys the solidarity of the group.

#### 8.2.2. *Contemporary situation and the rite of initiation into womanhood*

##### *Factors of change*

*Schooling:* The rite of initiation into womanhood, as practised in contemporary Ewe-dome, seems to have lost much of its significance. The good intentions as indicated

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<sup>267</sup> Welbourn F. B. & Ogot B. A., *A Place To Feel At Home*, London, Oxford University Press, 1996.

above, seem to be lost on the people. The rite appears to be performed now only as a matter of course or of fashion rather than for the many reasons that were given for it.

The very first reason for proclaiming the maturity of the young woman no longer seems to be tenable. Virtually no girl nowadays wants people (including her mother) to know that she is in her menstrual period, let alone announce it to the parents (mother) who will in turn make it public. Young women do not see the need any longer for that kind of advertisement about their maturity for marriage. Schooling, in fact, seems to make nonsense of that kind of announcement. At the time of their first menstrual periods, and in many cases, for a long time after that, the girls are still in school. Unlike in the past when there were no formal school systems and young women who had been proclaimed mature for marriage soon found themselves in marital homes, these young ones of today are now still in school. The prolonged education, and, sometimes, lack of jobs to do after school and its related problems, seem to make the proclamation unnecessary. The girl may be physiologically mature but quite unprepared for marriage. Furthermore, in the olden days, there was child betrothal, whereby girls in their infancy could be betrothed to boys by parents. Soon after the performance of the rite, "the boy's parents send a message to the girl's parents of their intention to take the girl home as wife for their son".<sup>268</sup> In that kind of situation, the announcement was meaningful as there was someone to take care of the "mature" woman who may have to leave the home of her parents. There is, at present, virtually no such child betrothal. Parents would not accept advances for marriage of a girl who is still in school (in say Junior Secondary School). Parents would like to see their children finish school and have jobs or professions that can take care of them (the women) and they (the parents) in their old age. Men also do not want to take young women out of school prematurely for marriage. To perform a rite with the intention of announcing the maturity of a young woman at a time when she is not ready for marriage appears, therefore, to be uncalled for.

*Christianity:* Many of the young women also belong to the Church. Because of their belief in the Lordship of Jesus Christ, they do not see themselves as being under the

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<sup>268</sup> Dzobo N. K., *African Marriage: Right or Wrong*, Ho, E. P. Church Press Ltd, 1986, p 37

control of supernatural powers which do not like the menstrual blood. As such they no longer observe taboos associated with them, hence the young woman no longer needs to leave home and stay outside the village.

*Financial Difficulties:* It appears also that the rite of initiation has lost much of its attraction as a result of financial constraints. Parents, especially the mother, are expected to perform the rite for their daughters. However, as a result of the harsh economic conditions of modern life, the mother is no longer able to finance the items needed for the rite. The young women, therefore, have to work tirelessly and combine finding resources for the rite at the same time as making provision for their daily sustenance. The salaries and wages of the women are such that they cannot do this quickly; they must manage as best as they can. It is not by accident, therefore, that the rite is often postponed to more auspicious times when the women are able to acquire all the necessary items. It is not surprising also that some of the women who go through the initiatory rite are already married. In some cases, it is the husband who, ironically, is expected to help the wife in finding the resources for the performance of a rite that has the intention of announcing the maturity for marriage of a young woman and getting her ready for a future husband. Again, some of the women even have children some of whom are girls who have reached the stage of puberty and for whom the rite ought to be performed. These mothers must perform their own initiation rites while they think of those for their children. Thus, mothers or married women and others who are not virgins are now going through a rite that was intended to make young women remain chaste until marriage.

*Other forms of Modernity :* One of the reasons for the performance of the rite of initiation into womanhood is to teach the young women values that are cherished in the society. There used to be, therefore, a period of confinement for some days (in some cases up to two months). This was the period during which the young women were not only fed properly to look attractive. It was also the time when knowledgeable elderly women in the society came round to teach them the needed societal values. In contemporary society, however, no such calculated effort is made during the rite for the teaching of the societal ideals. The rite, as we have observed, takes not more than one week. For obvious reasons, people, especially those working

in commercial companies or in the public service cannot afford to spend more time on the rite, for, they do not have much control over the times that they spend at their work places. The rite itself seems to be more of a matter of merry-making than anything else, since the main activities comprise cooking, eating, dressing gorgeously and receiving gifts. It is quite clear from our findings that some of the women in contemporary society do not even know that the rite had a purpose of teaching societal morality and various skills, or, even if they know, they seem to be unconcerned or not interested in the original purposes.

Thus, the rite of initiation into womanhood, one may say, has very good intentions but as practised in contemporary society, it appears to have lost much of its significance. Some are performing the rite merely out of tradition, that is, because tradition says they must perform the rite, rather than out of personal conviction about it. They are also holding on to something they see as stable, even in the modern world of change. Some would also not like to wait until death when the rite would be performed for them on their death beds. They would, therefore, do everything possible to have it performed before their death.

### *8.3. Why is the rite of initiation performed only for females?*

Young men in Ewe-dome, as in other parts of the Ghanaian society, do not go through the rite of initiation into adulthood like their female counterparts. Some African writers give the impression that "puberty rites" are meant or are performed for both males and females, as a way of initiating them into adulthood and full membership of the community. Perhaps, that ought to be the case. This is because both boys and girls come to life as human persons. The rite of outdoorings and naming is performed for both sexes to welcome them into the communities. In other words, both boys and girls are welcomed and incorporated into the society after birth. Both sexes are also expected to grow to maturity and live lives that conform to the cherished norms of the society. The children (boys and girls) grow to the stage of adolescence, where a rite has to be performed to mark their coming out of childhood into adulthood. The natural thing, one would expect, is that both boys and girls would go through the rite that would initiate them into adulthood. In societies like

Ewe-dome, indeed as in other parts of Ghana, however, the rite of initiation into adulthood is performed only for females. After that both men and women go through the marriage rite and that of death at the point of death. The question that comes to mind then is, why do males go through all other rites of passage except that of initiation into adulthood? In other words, should initiation rites end for men with the birth rite only while females go through another rite of initiation?

It is also worth noting that among many of the peoples of eastern and southern Africa, initiation schools for boys and girls play important roles as they enter into adulthood and full membership of the community (except in few societies where there is no formal initiation for either sex). Boys initiation schools even played and still play in some cases a major role in shaping the structure of adult male society among many southern African peoples. They also had an important role in the transition of authority from one generation of elders to another. This is found among peoples as far apart as the Masai (for example Kenya and Tanzania)<sup>269</sup>, the Bamangwato of Botswana and the Transvaal, and the Zulu. In eastern and southern Africa, there are only a few exceptions; for example, the Bemba and Lundu of Zambia have no initiation rites for men. It is said that among the Xhosa, for example: "Traditional initiation of youths is common and marks a significant change in status"<sup>270</sup>; and that "The ceremonies initiating boys into manhood are observed"<sup>271</sup>. In West Africa, the pattern is more varied but we still find many peoples having male initiation as well as female. The Mende of Sierra Leone as well as peoples of Guinea - Bissau, for example, follow this pattern of initiation. The famous novel of Camara Laye, *The African Child*, set in Guinea - Bissau, is focussed on male initiation and its centrality to the local culture. And among the Igbo and Ibibio peoples of eastern Nigeria, where both women and men undergo initiation rites for entry into adulthood, male initiation is seen as central to the working of the traditional community. A man may have a University degree and have achieved much in public life, but he will not be allowed to speak at a meeting of elders in his home village if he has not undergone

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<sup>269</sup> We had earlier quoted Mbiti at p 7, concerning rites that are performed among some eastern African peoples.

<sup>270</sup> Pauw B. A., *Christianity and Xhosa Tradition*, Oxford Univ. Press, Cape Town, London, New York, 1975, p 43.

<sup>271</sup> Ibid., p 98



the initiation rite for entry into adulthood. If initiation rites are seen as essential for the continued existence of the “nation”, and is a ritual element in the culture of the people, then, one wonders why there has been no serious attempt to discuss in the literature why there is no male initiation rite in some few societies, like Ewe-dome. Can female initiation in a society where there is no male initiation, then be treated as if it were the same phenomenon in a society where initiation is the key to adulthood for all human beings? Does it then not appear that initiation into adulthood of women alone has to have a different meaning from initiation in societies where men as well as women have to undergo such a rite? Yet this absence is not discussed in anthropological /theological literature, a gap that needs to be filled.

I have made the attempt, during the fieldwork, to find out why the rite of initiation is performed for females only in Ewe-dome. Various reasons have been given. Some said that women are the child-bearers, those who carry the wombs of human kind. They, therefore, need blessings that will ensure fertility; and the rite takes care of such blessings. Women also, it was said, are better able to care for the home and community, and ought, therefore, to be given the proper education that is needed for that; and the rite takes care of that<sup>272</sup>. To one man, “Men, excuse me to say, do not menstruate and do not need to go through a rite that is associated with menstruation.”<sup>273</sup> Some men also said that they do not need the items that are presented to the young women during the rite. Items such as beads, cloths, cooking utensils, and so on are usually useful for women, not men. Some women simply said “Men are not in that category”<sup>274</sup>

Furthermore, it was said, mothers would also want “to show” the future husbands of their daughters that the daughters are not being sent to their marital homes empty-handed. Men would, therefore, find it difficult to “bluff” women who have acquired basic future necessities for themselves and the home<sup>275</sup>. To some others, it is women who ought to be made attractive for men to marry. “Women do not ask men to marry them; it is men who see the women and ask for their hand in

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<sup>272</sup> Afetɔ Opoku-Abimah, Aveme, 12th April, 1997 (No. 38 under Bibliography).

<sup>273</sup> Name withheld, according to the wish of the interviewee.

<sup>274</sup> Mama Theodora Bakudie, Vane, for example, 14th April, 1997 (No. 18 under Bibliography).

<sup>275</sup> Ibid.

marriage”<sup>276</sup>. The rite, thus, serves as a way of advertising the attractive looks of women. Some elderly men also said that even though there is no organized rite of initiation for young men, in the olden days, some fathers saw to it that they bought guns for their sons who were of age and could marry. The gun was presented to the young man in the home, sometimes witnessed by a few members of the family, that is, it was not presented in an organized ceremony as it is for the females. To be able to use the gun was a sign that one was mature in age and could, therefore, marry<sup>277</sup>. These days, guns are no longer bought because as one man put it jokingly: “there even are no animals to hunt for, any way. It seems even the animals are doing family planning”. As to why, even though the rite for the young women also appears to have lost much of its significance, the rite has not been abolished just as fathers are no longer buying guns for their sons, it was said that that for females is custom and has to be performed, otherwise one is not regarded as a full woman in the society<sup>278</sup>.

We have heard the various views that have been presented by the people on why males in Ewe-dome do not go through rites to initiate them into manhood like their female counterparts. The overall impression one gets from the reasons given is that: The female in Ewe-dome society seems to be the central figure around whom childbirth, morality and other values that are cherished in the society are spun. The situation seems to fit with the famous dictum of Dr. Kwegyir Aggrey that: “If you educate a man you educate an individual; if you educate a woman you educate a nation”.<sup>279</sup> So that even though the rite may be seen to be one that initiates a person into adulthood, in the case of the Ewe-dome, it is more of a rite to educate the central figure of humanity, in this case, the woman, into the important institutions of homekeeping, childbearing, communal and personal morality and other values that are cherished in the society. The young woman seems to be one around whom life

<sup>276</sup> Tsiami Victor Ganusah, Vane, 15th June, 1997 (No. 28 under Bibliography).

<sup>277</sup> Afetɔ Opoku-Abimah, Aveme, 12th April, 1997 (No. 38 under Bibliography).

<sup>278</sup> This kind of feeling among the people was reiterated when on the 28th December, 1996, prior to the introduction of the newly installed Tsiami (spokesman) of the chief of Vane to the Avatime chiefs and Tsiamis, the Paramount chief of the Avatime Traditional Area, Osei Adja TekpɔV1, asked a question, among others, of whether the wife of the new Tsiami had gone through the rite of initiation into womanhood. It shows how important the rite is, as custom, to the chief, among others.

<sup>279</sup> I could not trace the source of this saying in written materials of Dr. Aggrey; but the saying is a popular one throughout the country, attributed to him.

revolves in the home and in the community. One would not be far from being right if one says that in Ewe-dome, as indeed, in other parts of the country, Ghana, there seems to be a demarcation of roles that are expected of a woman from those of men. The men, in the traditional set up, are expected to provide for the home while women are generally expected to “take care” of the home and community (even though women in these days work in the same professions as men to get money and provide for the home). [This is also not the same as saying that men do not do any kind of work that will enhance life in home and community]. Women, by the very fact that their bodies contain the wombs of humankind, and by the nurturing processes (at home) of breastfeeding and other forms of attachment of children and others to themselves, are better placed to take care of the home. The very onset of menstruation is a sign that the woman is ready for the sacred duty of giving birth to children. She, therefore, needs to be rejoiced with and taught what it means to be a “woman”. Women seem to be naturally more humane, tender-hearted, creative, and able, therefore, to take care of the home and community. They, therefore, need more education to be able to perform what we may call their natural duties. The woman also needs cooking utensils that she will need in the home for her nurturing activities and these are taken care of through provisions that are made for them in the rite. The rite, therefore, has biological as well as utilitarian reasons for it. Thus, the absence of a male initiation rite in Ewe-dome is basically due to the people’s image of who a woman is in the society, emphasizing the roles that are expected of her as against those that are expected of the man. To talk of equality of men and women the kind that some have been talking about these days is only to engage in “feminist talk”<sup>280</sup> - that is seen as irrelevant to the Ewe-dome society. It is to display ignorance of the

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<sup>280</sup> “Feminism”, to use the words of Ursula King, is the enterprise of “questioning of what different cultures and religions have traditionally held a woman’s place and role to be”. There is the feeling that various societies and religions are highly patriarchal and oppressive to women; marginalizing women at various sectors of life. Efforts are, therefore, being made by feminists to analyse the situation of women: Socio-cultural, economic, political and religious. In its “radical” form, it aims at “reform and reconstruction, of a reinterpretation of the Christian tradition, especially the Bible and the core symbols and teachings of Christianity in the light of women’s experience and with a critical attitude toward the socially and historically constructed notion of gender” - [cf. King Ursula, (ed.), *Feminist Theology from the Third World: A Reader*, Maryknoll, 1994: Orbis Books p 4. ] Some do not like the feminist enterprise, and as Mercy Oduyoye has observed: “Issues of sexism are supposed to belong to a minority of disgruntled, leisure-saturated, middle-class women of the capitalist West”. [cf. Oduyoye

concept of a woman in Ewe-dome. In the "Third World" in particular, as Mercy Oduyoye, a "Third World" theologian concerned especially with women issues, has noted, it is said by those who do not like the feminist enterprise that "men and women know *their place and play their role* ungrudgingly and no one feels suffocated by society's definition of femininity and masculinity".<sup>281</sup>

Our issue of reflection on the non-performance of males in a rite to initiate them into adulthood, as their female counterparts, has to do more with the intention of the rite to educate young ones on values that are cherished in the society. If the rite had an intention of educating young ones on values that are cherished in the society, then, one would think, the boys need the rite at least for that intention just as their female counterparts. It is important, for example, to educate young men on sexual morality just as it is important to educate young women on it. This is because it takes a male and a female to produce a teenage pregnancy, for instance, among other undesirable consequences of sexual laxity. To educate females only to be chaste till they are married, without giving a correspondent education to their counterpart males is to give an incomplete solution to a problem that is to be solved. It is not uncommon that some men entice women into sexual immorality through various ways. To give young men education to avoid such attitudes would, therefore, be very helpful in achieving at least the value of upholding sexual morality in the society. Furthermore, one may say that young men may also need to be taught other values like housewifery or taking care of the home. The knowledge will complement the efforts of women. It will also help men during times of their separation from the traditional environment, during times when they may find themselves in environments in which they will have to do their own cooking and other household chores. It is not unknown that some men, for lack of such forms of education, find themselves in situations where they are unable to cook or take care of the house, in the absence of women or their wives. Much money is, therefore, spent on buying

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Mercy Amba "Reflections from a Third World Women's Perspective: Women's experience and Liberation Theologies" in same book as above, p 27].

<sup>281</sup> Oduyoye Mercy Amba "Reflections from a Third World Woman's Perspective: Women's experience and Liberation Theologies", in Ursula King, (ed.), *Feminist Theology from The Third World: A Reader*, 1994: 27.

food from restaurants all the time, aside from the inability to tidy up things in homes - in the absence of wives.

Furthermore, if it is argued that the rite is also for fertility, that is, to bless young women for fertility through the rite, then, the young men also need the blessing like their female counterparts. For, giving birth to children does not depend only on fertile wombs; it depends also on virile and adequate sperms. Medical science has shown that all men are not automatically fertile. Some have low sperm counts and, therefore, find it difficult to produce children. It is time, in fact, traditional societies stopped blaming women alone for infertility in African societies, like Ewe-dome. Other suggestions concerning the performance of the rite in contemporary times will come in chapter 9.

#### *8.4. The Rite of initiation into womanhood and the concept of life after death*

The rite of initiation into womanhood in Ewe-dome also points out clearly, the people's concept about the after-life. In other words, through the rite, one can also understand what exactly the people mean when they talk of life in the hereafter as being the exact copy of life that is lived here on earth. The community of people, as established in the hereafter, takes exactly the form that it is here on earth. A woman who has gone through the rite of initiation into womanhood and is, therefore, fully accepted into the community of women on earth, would be accepted as a full woman into the community of women in the hereafter. A woman who could not go through the rite and, therefore, is not accepted as a full woman on earth, would not be accepted as a full woman in the hereafter. To die and not to be accepted into the hereafter, is to create problems for the dead person as well as for the community. The dead person, not finding a place to stay and, therefore, not at rest, would want to be reincorporated back into the community of the living. Since this is impossible, a series of mishaps would occur in the society. We heard of instances where some of such dead people came back through spirit possession, to ask for the rite to be performed for them. To avoid such unpleasant situations, the rite ought to be performed for every woman - irrespective of age or status - even on the death bed for those who have not been able to perform it before their death.



We shall reflect on the above issue and some others that may be raised, in the context of what I titled: The community versus individual rights. Other suggestions for the Church concerning the above issue will come in our concluding chapter.

### 8.5. *The Community Versus Individual Rights*

One issue worthy of our consideration in this ethical analysis is that which centres around what we may term “community versus individual rights”. Has the individual (woman) any rights in the traditional Ewe-dome society?

It appears to be the unanimous verdict of scholars that the African understanding of the human being is rooted in community. In this, the Ewe-dome do not appear to be an exception. A person’s individuality, Pobee, for example, has noted “is affirmed and fulfilled only in relation to the good of others in his kins-group. The life of the individual is best fulfilled among the groups in society and in relationship with other people”.<sup>282</sup> Or, to quote once more Mbiti’s famous statement: “Whatever happens to the individual happens to the whole group and whatever happens to the whole group happens to the individual. The individual can only say: I am, because we are; and since we are, therefore, I am”.<sup>283</sup>

In Ewe-dome society, one may say like the others that an individual’s life seems to be so much of concern to others in the community that one sometimes wonders whether an individual can claim to have a life of his or her own. One seems to be swallowed up by the “group’s rights” or the expectations or concerns of the group.

The communal concern, we have noted, begins even before birth. From the time of pregnancy, society shows much concern for the foetus as well as for the pregnant woman, as taboos or various forms of regulations are laid down to guide the conduct in a bid to ensure her health as well as that of the unborn child. The woman is, for example, to be protected from the evil eye and hence the taboo for her not to bathe at night - the time when nocturnal spirits are most active. The outdoorings and naming that follows the birth is performed and participated in by all. Everyone must

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<sup>282</sup> Pobee John S., *Skenosis: Christian Faith in an African context*, Zimbabwe, Mambo Press, 1992, p 66

<sup>283</sup> Mbiti John S., *African Religions and Philosophy*, pp 108 - 109



know of the new addition to the society, share the joy with the parents, and show his or her acceptance of the child as such, as a member of the society. The society, in fact, abhors childlessness, for, it is children who will perpetuate humankind; they are therefore, welcome. Childlessness may lead to a second marriage whereby a new partner (usually a new woman) may have to be arranged for to produce children. At the outdoorings, the child is also made to feel that he or she is not alone in the life that is to be lived; and ought also to live within the norms of the society.

At adolescence, the young adult, growing to maturity, is made to learn or understand things about what it means to live a mature adult life in community. The society, by means of an elaborate set of rituals, has made provision for the incorporation of the adolescent into the life of adulthood. In most African societies, we have discussed, the rite of initiation into adulthood is performed for both boys and girls. It is, however, performed only for young women in Ewe-dome and other parts of the country (Ghana). The adolescent, through the rite, is to learn about what is expected of her as an adult and she is made to feel that she is not alone even in her adult life as the whole group comes round to initiate her into this stage of womanhood.

The stage of marriage is another time for the society to show its solidarity with a newly married couple. Indeed, according to tradition and still today to some, the very choice of the partner begins with parents or other concerned members of the kin group who find out the background of the potential marriage partner for their kin person. The person must, among other things, come from a family that is hard working; a family that has no criminal records of, say, murder or stealing, or medical history of a disease like madness. These days, however, the young adults usually make their own choice and then inform their parents about it. The couple, at the time of marriage, are made to understand that they are not alone in the marital stage. Both are being married, not only as a couple, but into four *fomewo* (families) of the man's father and of the mother, and those of the woman's father and mother. These families comprise the mother, father, sisters, brothers, aunts, uncles, nieces, nephews, grandparents, and so on, all of whom are members of the families of the young man and woman. These families, people from outside, especially westerners, refer to as

“extended families”. In the traditional system, there is nothing like an “extended family”, for, there is not any other family. Each person who is related by blood to someone either through paternal or maternal lineage is simply a member of the *fome* (family). Unlike what obtains in, say, modern western Europe<sup>284</sup>, where to be asked whether one has a family is to be asked whether one is married (with children), to ask an Ewe-dome whether he or she has a family is to ask a meaningless question. This is because every person has a mother, father, aunts, uncles, grandparents, nieces, nephews, and so on, all of whom make up a family. A family does not comprise only of wife, husband and children. In other words, the concept of a family, seen in terms of wife, husband and children, is an imported one in Ewe-dome.

In view of the Ewe-dome concept of family, there is mutual acceptance into each other's home. The wife in particular, must be prepared to welcome family members to their home, especially the mother-, father-, brothers-, and sisters-in-law. Refusal to be hospitable is regarded as selfishness, an attitude that does not augur well for the marital life. This is not to say, however, that there is (always) unnecessary interference in the home of married couples, though, to borrow the words of Gyekye, “there is no guarantee against it”<sup>285</sup> - that is, the interference. Such mutual acceptance, even though can sometimes be burdensome, helps in keeping marriage stable, since advice can easily be given to the couple in cases of misunderstanding, usually regarded as “small matters”. It is also almost an obligation to one's family to marry. To grow up to marriageable age and not to marry is to draw the attention of others to oneself. The interpretations that may be put on the unmarried state are that the person is mean or selfish - not wanting to share one's life or possession with others; or simply put, there must be something wrong with such a person.

The family tree is such that in smaller communities or villages, one finds oneself related to almost every other person. In larger towns, however, the community is made up of people not only with biological bonds, but also with others

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<sup>284</sup> I was told that the kind of concept of family that existed in Britain, in the not too distant past, was similar to that of Ewe-dome.

<sup>285</sup> Gyekye Kwame, *African Cultural Values : An introduction*, Philadelphia, Pa-/Accra, Sankofa Publishing Company, 1996, p 79

who are not blood relations but share the same cultural values, and all of whom have the concern for one another at heart. What affects one, we may say again, affects all others. Joys and tears are shared together.

At the death of a member of the group, all come together to mourn and give a fitting burial in the indigenous mourning clothes with colours of red, black, maroon, or white in the case of the elderly. Burials and funerals are usually scheduled for the week-ends (Saturdays and Sundays) and it is on such occasions that one can really see what is meant by group solidarity in Ewe-dome. Donations are made either in kind or in cash to alleviate the burden of cost that is incurred at the funeral. Each one is expected to be sensitive to the needs of others.

With all this involvement of the community in the life of the individual, the questions that come to mind are: Can an individual in Ewe-dome claim to have a life of his or her own? Can an individual attain the fullest realization of his or her life as a person? How free is the individual in the communal life of Ewe-dome? With particular reference to the rite of initiation into womanhood, the question arises as to whether the initiand has any freedom of opinion or choice? These questions require some reflection.

It is true to say that every human being is born as an individual. Every normal being is also born not as an automaton, but as a thinking being with desires, passions, tastes and various needs. One is also born to live with others, each of whom also has his or her own dispositions, choices, inclinations, and so on. Quite often, one's desires, tastes, interests, and so on, are at variance and, therefore, conflict with those of others. Again, since human beings are imperfect and live in a world of imperfection, a world in which resources are not adequate to meet the various needs and desires and interests of each and every one, it is quite obvious that conflicts would occur. And conflicts do occur.

To minimize conflicts and bring about peaceful co-existence, while at the same time allowing room for the realization of individual needs and potentials, various declarations, rules and regulations are made. Rightly does Reisman express that:

Most of us are not heroes or saints, and if we insist that men must always act on their ideal, this may mean either that the ideals will be modified to suit the

degree of one's courage and energy or that individuals will become cynical about themselves or deluded about their society or both.<sup>286</sup>

In some cases, the rules and regulations have been codified in constitutions and declarations. The codes are formulated from observation, experiences and reflection. Perhaps the most widely known and referred to is the one promulgated by the General Assembly of the United Nations.

#### 8.5.1. *United Nations Declaration of Human Rights*

On the 10th of December, 1948, the General Assembly of the United Nations adopted and proclaimed a document that is referred to as the "Universal Declaration of Human Rights". The Document claims, quite rightly, to be universal, applying to all persons irrespective of geographical or political boundary, sex, race, or religion. Its preamble includes a giving of "recognition of the inherent dignity and of the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family...the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world".<sup>287</sup> In Article 2 of the declaration, it is stated that:

Everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration; without distinction of any kind, such as race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status. Furthermore, no distinction shall be made on the basis of the political, jurisdictional or international status of the country or territory to which a person belongs, whether it be independent, trust, non-self-governing or under any other limitation of sovereignty<sup>288</sup>.

The rights set forth in the declaration are seen as basic to human life. Article 1, for example, states that:

Article 1: "All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood"<sup>289</sup>.

Article 3 states that: "Everyone has the right to life, liberty and security of person"<sup>290</sup>.

<sup>286</sup> Reisman David, *The Lonely Crowd: A study of the changing American character*, New Haven & London, Yale University Press, 1969, p xx

<sup>287</sup> Universal Declaration of Human Rights, United Nations, Department of Public Information, 1948, .

<sup>288</sup> Ibid.

<sup>289</sup> Ibid. p 3

<sup>290</sup> Ibid.

The above Articles, and several others, provide for matters that are truly basic to all human beings, born as persons, with capacities to think or reason, feel or choose. Human life is the most valued of all possessions and every effort ought, therefore, to be made to protect it. Whoever kills a fellow human being, except on grounds of self-defence in unavoidable circumstances, is seen as a most wicked person, for taking the most valuable possession of another. Appropriate punishment is given to such a person; in some cases, death. Other rights that are inviolable to the dignity of human beings, and, therefore, needing to be protected, include freedom from servitude or slavery (Article 4); freedom from torture or cruelty (Article 5); freedom of movement (Article 13); freedom of opinion and expression (Article 19); and freedom of thought, conscience and religion (Article 18).<sup>291</sup>

The bulk of the provisions in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights are also included in various other documents or constitutions of various nations or organizations, to serve as guides to the conduct of life in the nations - moral, social, economic, political, and so on. In its Charter on Human Rights, the Organization of African Unity has, among others, Articles that are found in the Document of the United Nations. Article 4 of that Charter has it that: "Every human being shall be entitled to respect for his life and integrity of his person. No one may be arbitrarily deprived of this right."<sup>292</sup>

And in the Ghanaian Constitution of 1992, the current one in use, Article 12(2), among others, states that:

Every person in Ghana, whatever his race, place of origin, political opinion, colour, religion, creed or gender shall be entitled to the fundamental human rights and freedoms of the individual contained in this Charter but subject to respect for the right and freedoms of others and for the public interest.<sup>293</sup>

One of such rights and freedoms is contained in Article 15 (1) which says that "The dignity of all persons shall be inviolable".<sup>294</sup>

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<sup>291</sup> Ibid. p 3 - 6.

<sup>292</sup> "Organization of African Unity Charter on Human Rights" in *Ecumenism and Democratic culture Series (Book 2)*, Accra, Christian Council of Ghana, 1995, p 31

<sup>293</sup> Constitution of The Republic of Ghana, 1992, p 12

<sup>294</sup> Ibid.

The above declarations stem from the basic truth that the individual is primary.

However, apart from the international and national documents which codify fundamental rights, there are in some societies, various other forms of codes that are also meant to regulate life. And the society in such cases seems to be primary to the individual. These codes of such societies, we shall refer to as “societal rights”.

### 8.5.2. *Societal Rights*

Societal rights are to some extent, based on reflections about the human condition. They are also sometimes based on presuppositions or beliefs or ideas held about the world and human persons. These are found in various forms of customary practices, rites, taboos, and so on, all of which have become traditions as they have been practised over the years. While some are in harmony with the national and international declarations, others do not seem to fall in line with such declarations.

In Ewe-dome, the very rite of initiation into womanhood embodies practices that reflect some of the societal rights. For instance, the young woman is given moral education that is meant to inculcate a sense of community, a sense of how to live a responsible life with others. People are taught, for example, not to use others as means of satisfying their sexual desires, for, sexual life is regarded as one that is to be enjoyed only in a responsible way in marriage. Such a teaching would also help avoid having children outside marriage for whom to care could be a problem to those involved and the group as a whole.

However, certain aspects of the rite of initiation into adulthood, as practised not only in Ewe-dome, but in some other African societies, seem not to be in harmony with some of the national and international declarations. These are practices which seem to be dehumanizing or injurious to the physical or mental well-being of a person. The Ewe-dome practice of generally making merry with a young woman may be said to be a very simple and harmless rite. However, the subtle ways of taunting those who have come of age but are not able to perform the rite, and the performance of it on the death bed for those who could not perform it before their death, can be an unpleasant experience for a person and the kin group. Those old in age who have not



performed the rite, we have noted, are asked whether they have ever been to the market, or climbed the mountain or bathed with lime-water. These are some of the rituals that are considered to be important in the rite and which are expected to be performed by the initiand. Such questions have the deeper meaning of telling the person that she is not “a woman”, for, she has not yet performed the rite - even though she is old in age. Such statements can lower a person’s confidence in herself as a fully grown woman. Some, therefore, acquiesce and undergo the rite to avoid the taunting, rather than out of their own volition.

Other forms of initiation rites that are practised in some societies on the continent - though not in Ewe-dome - include painful and sometimes injurious operations of circumcision for males and excision of the clitoris, or in some cases, of the labia minora of females. Circumcision of males may have its good sides and, if performed within days after birth, may be said to be good. To delay it till a time when a boy is said to be at the verge of entering adulthood, and to perform it in a manner that is to make the boy “learn to endure hardships”<sup>295</sup> is not a particularly acceptable practice. Similarly, excision or removing the clitoris or the labia minora, and also at a time when the girl is of age, can be an unpleasant experience for those involved. This is because apart from the pain that the girl would have to endure, the act itself could bring medical complications and suffering to the woman during and after the performance of the rite. In her medical work among women who had gone through such operations, Koso-Thomas has noted that: “...the presence of the scars prevents urine and the menstrual flow escaping by the normal channels. This may lead to acute retention of urine and menstrual blood, and to a condition known as *haematocolpas*, which is highly detrimental to the health of the girl or woman concerned.”<sup>296</sup> It is said also that it could lead to “prolonged and obstructed labour”.<sup>297</sup> Yet, these must be endured in order to satisfy a societal demand or right, of making a young woman into a full woman or of making her less sensitive to approaches of men and, thus, ensure her faithfulness to the future husband alone. Such practices could be said to

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<sup>295</sup> Mbiti J. S., *African Religions and Philosophy*, p 122.

<sup>296</sup> Koso-Thomas Olayinka, *The Circumcision of Women: A Strategy for Eradication*, London & New Jersey, Zed Books Ltd, p 10

<sup>297</sup> *Ibid.*, p 27.

undermine Article 5 of the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights, for example, which states that: “No one shall be subjected to torture or to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment”.<sup>298</sup>

Thus, Governments or international bodies may come out with written constitutions to guide life in the nations. These have been formulated out of empirical experience with the human condition and on the basis of actual occurrences. The declarations are meant to be fair and universal to all; however, some of the customary practices by which some live in various societies, based on beliefs and ideas about human beings and the world, may not be in consonance with the universal and fundamental rights. They are also sometimes difficult to “touch” since some are based on supernatural experiences that do not always easily lend themselves to full understanding.

Let me hasten to add that there are some of the societal rights that are in harmony with the international and national declarations. These are rights in Ewe-dome which, for example, give one the freedom to own private property and freedom to have a fair and free trial and justice. In the latter case, those who are offended by others in one way or the other, can take their cases to the head of the lineage (*samemetsitsi*) for redress. It is a fair and thorough system in which each party states his or her case. Wherever it is difficult to pass instant judgement, that is, during arbitration, a jury, comprising of members present at the arbitration, is asked to go outside to consult the *abrewa* - a borrowed Akan word meaning “the old lady”. The term refers to extra-consultation. Outside, the case is weighed carefully. Those appointed return with a verdict that in most cases, is not just a simple matter of one party being guilty and the other being not guilty. The opportunity is seized to give a good talk to all present to live lives that will not endanger relationships. The offended party is then fined, a fine that usually includes at least a bottle of drink for all to partake in as a way of bringing about a reconciliation between the two parties. Peace is, thus, restored there and then. Such a method of redress helps, to a large extent, in avoiding technicalities and huge expenses that are sometimes faced at the law courts.

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<sup>298</sup> Universal Declaration of Human Rights, p 4.

It is only matters that are seen to be beyond the redress of the lineage (which may involve criminal acts like murder) that are referred to the law courts for redress.

Societies in which there are what we are referring to as “societal rights”, we have said, are to some extent, noted to be communalistic in nature. African societies are noted for this. In comparing some new western styles of life with that of the African,

Menkiti has this to say:

In the African understanding priority is given to the duties which individuals owe to collectivity, and their rights, whatever these may be, are seen as secondary to the exercise of their duties. In the West, on the other hand, we find a construal of things in which certain specified rights of individuals are seen as antecedent to the organization of society; with the function of government viewed, consequently, as being the protection and defence of these individual rights.<sup>299</sup>

Menkiti’s observation is valid to some extent in the sense that despite some national declarations, some persons in African societies go through certain practices that are considered as “duties which individuals owe to collectivity”. Some of the practices, it is true, may not be wholly in the interest of the individual but one still has to go through them. The Ghanaian Government, for example, like Governments in the West, is in these days, doing everything possible, to protect and defend the individual rights of the citizens. Excision of some female genitals, for example, an act that used to be practised in the northern part of the country, is now made a criminal act and anybody found practising it can be taken to the law courts and charged with a criminal offence. Article 26(2) of the Constitution of Ghana, for example, has it that “All customary practices which dehumanize or are injurious to the physical and mental well-being of a person are prohibited”.<sup>300</sup> However, more still has to be done in giving a thorough education to the people on reasons for the abolition of the practices, for them to have an inner conviction to stop the practices rather than see the prohibition as an imposition from the Government. So that the Government of Ghana has more to do to protect and defend the individual rights, than the Governments in individualistic states in the West have to do.

<sup>299</sup> Menkiti I. A., “Person and community in African Traditional Thought” in Wright R. A., (ed.), *African Philosophy: An Introduction*, Washington, University Press of America, 1979, p 167.

<sup>300</sup> Constitution of The Republic of Ghana, p 27.

The trend of communal life is, however, changing in modern times as a result of factors such as urbanization, scientific and technological advancement, poverty and various religions and foreign influences.

*Some factors of change in societal rights*

*Urbanization and economic factors:* Those who leave their traditional environment to work in urban cities and towns, for example, are exposed to various kinds of experiences. The value of hospitality, for instance, of accommodating members of the “extended family” is difficult to practise in the urban areas. Accommodation is so expensive that many cannot afford houses in which to welcome people. Stealing and other social vices are also on the increase. The situation in Nairobi, described by Healey and Sybert, is not very different from the present Ghanaian city life when they note that:

Today in African cities, such as Nairobi, strangers are suspect. Visitors are screened carefully by security guards. A telling example are the many signs in front of urban houses in Nairobi that say, *Mbwa Kali* (Swahili for “Angry Dog”)...People are nervous about the increasing theft and violence. Thus, many practices of African hospitality are falling by the wayside due to excessive individualism and secularization.<sup>301</sup>

The value of hospitality is, thus, on the decline, and so are some other values.

Some also, as a result of harsh economic conditions, are not able to contribute effectively towards the maintenance of people in the family system, or towards the maintenance of the community as a whole. They may have the will, but as an Ewe proverb has it: *Kotɔ melɔa ame wonya na o*, meaning, “It is difficult for poor people to demonstrate their love or will to give, in practical terms for people to see, because of poverty”. Some, therefore, tend or seem not to care about the communal expectations of taking care of others.

*Christian Religious Influences:* Various forms of religious influence can also be said to be a factor in the changes in the communal life in Africa. The Christian faith, for

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<sup>301</sup> Healey Joseph & Sybert Donald, *Towards an African Narrative Theology*, Maryknoll, Orbis Books, 1996, p 197

example, sees salvation, the ultimate goal of the faith, as an individual affair, in the sense that it is considered as an individual relationship between a person and Christ/God. It is no longer the situation in which “A person cannot detach himself from the religion of his group, for, to do so is to be severed from his roots, his foundation, his context of security, his kinships, and the entire group of those who make him aware of his existence”.<sup>302</sup>

By Christian standards in Ewe-dome at present, a person may decide to sever himself or herself from the traditional religion of his or her group, as he or she has found security in Christ, the one who has made him or her aware of his or her existence. It is like saying with Paul that “it is no longer I [*or the society (sic)*] who lives, but Christ who lives in me; and the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God....” (cf. Gal. 2: 20). Paul does not say one should cut away oneself from the community (for Christ does not encourage separation from the world, cf. John 17:15). On the contrary, Paul exhorts the communal life - cf. Rom. 12: 5; ICor. 12: 26). Paul is saying that confessing Christ is a sufficient way of achieving security and meaning to a person’s existence. It appears, therefore, that any other religion (of a person’s group) that does not measure up to the standards of Christ, even if that religion is that of the person’s group (hence demanding some societal rights), cannot give meaning to a person’s existence. Some Christians would, therefore, avoid communal practices that they see as inimical to their growth in the Christian faith.

Let me mention, however, that there seems to be a paradoxical attitude to communalism in the charismatic Churches in particular.<sup>303</sup>

On the one hand, some of the charismatics are seen by some as those who separate themselves from all others (including other “nominal Christians”) whom they are at the same time trying to convert to the faith. This is because they seem to require people to go through certain religious experiences at all costs. These include speaking in tongues, some activities to get one baptized with the Holy Spirit, various

<sup>302</sup> Mbiti John S. *African Religions and Philosophy*, p 2

<sup>303</sup> To remind ourselves, charismatic Churches, in this sense, are those in which there are found what the believers see as profound manifestations of spiritual gifts or as the working of the Holy Spirit. In Ghana, the worship sessions of charismatic Churches are usually vibrant, with music that is exhilarating. Prayers can be spontaneous and prayed aloud. There is also a great sense of commitment to Bible studies, among other things.

forms of deliverances; they also prescribe abstention from any form of alcoholic drink, among other things. Some people in the community find it difficult approaching such charismatic Churches, who seem to be proselytising.

On the other hand, the charismatics could be said to be reviving the communal life in Ghana, as they show a great sense of belongingness or communal life. The presence of members of these Churches in great numbers and donations that are usually made in kind and in cash to people in times of joyful celebrations or distressful situations, family cell meetings, and healing sessions that are organized, are some of the factors that draw people to these Churches. The communal life within such Churches can be quite satisfying. So that the Christian faith in Ewe-dome, in a seemingly paradoxical way, is contributing to the decline in the traditional communal spirit while at the same time it is helping to enhance communal life in the society.

One would also add that in spite of the communal expectations, there is, in fact, the realization in the society that an individual has his or her own life to live. That an individual can take the initiative to develop according to a person's potentialities and also be self-dependent. There is an Ewe proverb that states that: *Tekpadedzi medie nu o*, meaning, "one does not become satisfied if one would always wait to add a bit of yam to what others are cooking". In its deeper sense, the proverb means that an individual should not always rely on the group but must learn to take initiatives and be on his or her own. The individual is made to understand that his or her personal efforts and achievements are as important as the communal values or achievements. The individual is, therefore, encouraged through such sayings to come to the realization or actualization of his or her potentials. The society gives recognition to the fact that a person's talents and capacities are important for the development of the society itself. In fact, the joy that is expressed by the community at the achievements of an individual is at the same time, a way of encouraging others to come to the realization of their own utmost achievements. So that one cannot always talk of a group or communal living as if it were absolutely over and above an individual's existence. Indeed, *Ada sɔ ha, mɔ le eme* - literally meaning - "even though sugar cane plants look alike in height, there are always paths in them". This Ewe proverb also points to the fact that communalistic life does not necessarily



negate individual growth and development - even though it can sometimes be difficult to see the paths or individuals' stands in the growth.

The very quest for knowledge about the reasons for the performance of the initiation rite by some of the young women in Ewe-dome, at least in these times, also points to the fact that in spite of the communal or societal demands or rights the individual has a right in Ewe-dome. I have realized from the field work what seems to be a good sign of moral obligation that at least, as at present, people can ask "for what reasons and benefits one must behave in a particular way rather than others"<sup>304</sup> - a question we raised in our introductory chapter. It is appropriate to reiterate that some have actually opted out of the rite of initiation into womanhood, as they have found it to be against their religious convictions. The rite was not performed on the death beds for two of such people - the late Akorfa Akortia and Afua Gbagbo of Avatime traditional area - who would not perform it because of their religious conviction. The observation of the queenmother in the area that she did not think it would be performed for such people was proved right. This points to the acceptance of one's right to practise the religion of one's choice, at least in contemporary society, as well as to the dynamic nature of the society.

In the light of the above changes, one needs to be careful of using certain terminologies that give the impression that (communal) life in Ewe-dome or Africa is static. The Ewe-dome of today, is not as communalistic as he or she used to be some years ago.

However, much needs to be done to strike a balance between the communal expectations or demands and the right of the individual. The communities, not only in Ewe-dome, but elsewhere in Africa, ought to give greater respect for the personhood of the individual, having in mind always, the physical, mental, religious and other aspirations and convictions or feelings of the individual. There is the need to have mutual respect whereby the community does not impose excessive conditions or demands on the individual of things that can bring stressful mental or physical pain to its members. The individual has the right to life, the right to physical and mental

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<sup>304</sup> Kudadjie J. N., "Aspects of African Ethics", in Pobee J. S., (ed.), *Religion, Morality and Population Dynamics*, p 22.

health, the right to belong to a religion of his or her choice, among other rights. It would be wrong, for example, to use reported cases of the spirits of some dead women coming to possess persons in the community and asking for the rite of initiation into womanhood to be performed for them as reported in some parts of Ewe-dome as the justification for demanding performance of the rite for all others some of whom would not want to perform it. Each case needs to be handled discreetly, for, there are some who may be finding their rest after death and who have, therefore, not asked for the performance of the rite after their death. The individual's faith need not be disturbed by such communal or societal demands. It is important to stress this; for, even though the rite was not performed on the death beds of the two women mentioned above, and even though the queenmother of Avatime traditional area said that the rite would not be performed for people after their death, there are many in the other traditional areas who said that the rite will have to be performed for everybody - irrespective of their religious or other convictions. This kind of imposition happens in some other African communal societies where the society does decide to perform certain rites for people who all along have stood against them. It would be good if the communities would respect and not violate the personhood of the individual, bearing in mind their total physical, mental, spiritual well being as well as the ever changing conditions under which humans live.

On the other side of the coin, one would say that in as much as the community gives respect to the individual, care needs to be taken not to undermine communal values that have been found to be useful to the society. Selfishness and lack of warm attitude to one another, disrespect for people and various other vices must be eschewed by the individuals. So that where there is the means and need for it, one individual should help the other, giving material, emotional, psychological or other forms of support to one another. I would agree with Gyekye that:

The African people and their cultures should resist the path of extreme individualism, which will only lead to the rise of lonely crowds in their societies and fragmentation of values and, in consequence, undermine the whole meaning and essence of a human society.<sup>305</sup>

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<sup>305</sup> Gyekye Kwame, *African Cultural Values*, p 51

So that in as much as the individual tries to assert his or her rights, care must be taken not to run oneself into the other extreme of individualism. Living together in society is natural. As an Ewe proverb expresses it: *Dusi bɔ̃ klɔ̃a miabɔ̃ eye miabɔ̃ ha klɔ̃a dusibɔ̃* - literally meaning - "The right hand cleans or washes the left one while the left one does the same to the right one". To refuse to have social or communal relationships is to adopt an unnatural attitude to life, for, self-sufficiency is an utopian ideal no one can attain. It will be unhelpful for an individual to rebel against the community as if one is an island to oneself. Or, for the individual to want to please oneself only, refusing to acknowledge the institutions of the community as a whole. A community is not an institution that would deliberately want to cause harm to the individuals, who in the first place are the very ones that have made up the community. Communal practices that tend to be exploitative often have good intentions behind them, or are meant to protect the interest of the individual - even though sometimes they tend to become rather conservative even where they ought to change with new conditions of living. The very rite of initiation into womanhood, as we have found from our studies, is meant, among other things, to protect a young woman from men who may like to take advantage of her, and to give her material as well as emotional support. It is rather unfortunate that it has turned out, in contemporary times, to become a mechanical institution in the sense that it has to be performed even though it has lost many of the good intentions for which it was instituted.

The society needs a constant examination of its beliefs and practices. Where it has found them to be no longer tenable as a result of, perhaps, scientific or other developments and changes in the society, then, it should not hesitate to modify the practices or even abandon them altogether depending on the situation. The suggestion, then, is that while the society does not have to treat individual feelings as if they do not exist, the individual also needs to respect the society by not undermining everything even where the society's practices do not undermine individuals' rights. By a rule of mutual respect, the individual can live a life as a person with innate rights, even in the midst of the communal life.

## Chapter 9

### A WAY FORWARD

#### *Summary*

In this dissertation, we have attempted to discuss some cultural practices (the rites of birth and initiation into womanhood) of a Ghanaian people, the Ewe-dome, in rural setting where these practices are still of central importance. A number of specific villages/towns were chosen and visited over a period of months, for observation and interviews.

We have discussed the impact of the Christian faith as transmitted by two Presbyterian Churches on the people of these villages/towns and upon their religio/cultural beliefs and practices. We have attempted to discuss the areas of conflict that exist between the Christian faith as it has been presented in this area, and the local traditional beliefs and practices. We discussed also the impact of various forms of modernity on the traditional rites.

In reflecting theologically upon the beliefs and practices, we have tried to show the positions of some Christian scholars on such areas of conflict, and how they are seen by the people on “the ground” in Ewe-dome.

We have also attempted an ethical reflection on some of the moral issues that are raised by the beliefs and practices of the people.

In this concluding chapter, we wish to suggest some possible ways forward for the chosen Churches and others in the area, in dealing with the problems we have discussed. Before making these suggestions, we need to recapitulate a little.

#### *Ewe-dome beliefs about the world and concept of a person*

Ewe-dome is a sub-group of the larger Ewe group of people of Ghana, Togo and Benin. Pockets of non-Ewe speaking people are also, however, found in the area

of the villages/towns we have studied. These people also practise rituals similar to those of the Ewe. The Ewe area lies at the south-eastern side of the country, Ghana.

The Ewe-dome, like many other African peoples, believe that the cosmos came about through a creator God, *Mawu*. *Mawu*, in His creation, created also some spirit beings known as *trɔwo*. These help in administering the world of nature as well as human life. The *trɔwo* are seen as powerful and the traditional religious people and some others give them devotional attention. Supplicants go to shrines that are made for them and through *trɔnuwo* (traditional priests) and *trɔsiwo* (traditional priestesses), they lay their supplications before the *trɔwo*. The requests include those for material as well as spiritual needs. *Mawu*, the ultimate Being, is also called upon in times of trouble or for thanksgiving, or for various other purposes.

A human person in Ewe-dome is created by *Mawu*. A person is made up of *nutila* (flesh) and *gbɔgbɔ* (breath of life). The *gbɔgbɔ* is part of *Mawu*'s own spirit in a person, that which makes a person *amegbetɔ*. The word *amegbetɔ*, the Ewe word for a human being, comes from two Ewe words, *ame* and *agbetɔ*. *Ame* means a moulded being and *agbetɔ* means one with life. *Amegbetɔ*, therefore, means a moulded being with life.

A person does not only come to life with the flesh and breath of life; a person is also given a *dzɔgbese* (a divine package) by which to live his or her life. In everyday life, those who seem to be very successful with little effort are said to have come to life with a good *dzɔgbese*, while those who seem to be struggling with little success are said to be suffering from bad *dzɔgbese*. Such expressions give the impression that a person's life is predestined by *Mawu*. To the Ewe-dome, however, to say that a person has a *dzɔgbese* does not necessarily mean that a person has no freewill by which to act. The concept of *dzɔgbese* is more of making people aware that each person, to a large extent, is a unique person to *Mawu*. There is no point, therefore, in envying or copying blindly the way of life of other people. Indeed, in cases of persistent failure or misfortunes, efforts are made to rectify the situation. Again, in keeping with this belief, those who persistently misbehave are also repeatedly punished. All this points to the fact that people are free to work out their

lives and are held responsible for their behaviour. Hence, freewill and the concept of *dzɔgbese* are not mutually exclusive in the minds of the people.

A person in Ewe-dome comes to life also with a spiritual entity known as *gbetsi* or *gbetsivɔ*. The *gbetsi* usually connotes a bad influence, an entity that makes people not to live virtuous lives. Efforts are made through various ritual acts to remove a *gbetsivɔ* from the life of a person, so that the person might live a virtuous life.

There is also a concept about *Aklama* - believed to be the spiritual guardian of a person. *Aklama* helps to deliver a person from terrible situations.

At death, a person's life is not completely annihilated. The dead, in spirit form, go to *tsiefe*. *Tsiefe* is a place that is not seen with physical eyes, but life in *tsiefe* is believed to be like life on earth. We have discussed the various categories of the dead and the influence that they can bear on the living. Those in particular who had lived useful lives by the standards of the society, had grown to mature or ripe age and died peaceful or natural deaths - that is, not dying through such deaths like suicide, drowning or madness - even though are at *tsiefe*, continue to be concerned with the living on earth. In other words, death does not separate the living from the dead; there is still communication between the living and the dead. In the traditional Ewe-dome homes, therefore, morsels of food are put on the ground for the dead to eat as the living also eat. The relationship is also rekindled through the living giving drink to the ancestors, usually in libation prayers. In the libation prayers, the ancestors are invited to witness important occasions, and to grant the people various needs. The name of *Mawu* is mentioned alongside those of the ancestors in prayers of libation on certain occasions, as for instance, during the rite of naming and outdoorings, while those of *trɔwo* are included on other occasions such as during drought, festivals and difficult arbitrations.

Among the Ewe-dome, serious evil events and some extraordinary things in the life of a person or a community are explained by reference to the concept of witchcraft (*adzɛ*) or sorcery (*dzoduame*). People who possess this power are feared and hated in Ewe-dome society as in other African societies. In order to discuss



seriously any important element in traditional culture, the witchcraft/sorcery explanation of evil events has also to be kept in mind.

*The Encounter between Christian faith and the traditional beliefs and practices*

Ewe-dome had early contact with the Christian faith through missionary activities of the North German Mission Society, also known as the Bremen Mission. The beginning of the missionary work was in 1847. There was also Scottish missionary work in the area, especially around the First and Second World Wars. It was an encounter in which converts to the Christian faith were asked to deny the traditional spiritual beliefs, and hence the practices associated with them, and to accept the faith about Christ only. The name *Mawu* was adopted and used for God. Devotion to the *trɔwo*, however, was and still is to be regarded as idolatry or giving devotion to other powers rather than to *Mawu* alone. Christians were and are still, therefore, not to approach shrines of the *trɔwo* for any form of religious activity.

Traditional beliefs and practices that had to do with the dead were also to be denied by Christians. These include the making of libation to the ancestors. The act is seen as idolatry, dependence on other supernatural powers, rather than dependence on *Mawu* alone.

The belief of the people in the dangerous powers of witchcraft and sorcery was regarded to be superstitious and with no foundation in reality. The Churches ignored these beliefs subsequently as if they no longer existed.

It was not possible to extricate completely from the minds of many people, some of those things the Church condemned from the general pattern of religious-cultural activities of the village people. Many Christians who tried to follow completely the Christian way as it had been prescribed by the missionaries and continued by the Churches, sometimes, find themselves in various conflicts in individual conscience as well as with some activities of the group.

Among the fundamental cultural practices of the people are the rites of birth and initiation into womanhood. Some of the practices related to these are related also to the traditional spiritual beliefs and practices. These rites continue to be very

important to the people in the villages of Ewe-dome. The aspects of the practices that are related to the traditional religious beliefs, among other things, are creating various conflicts among some Christians and others in the society. In our studies, we have found also that the issue is not only that of conflicts between Christian beliefs and the traditional beliefs and practices. There are also moral and ethical issues, raised by individual human rights.

### *Rite of Birth*

A human person is valued so highly in Ewe-dome, indeed, like in other societies that at birth, a child needs to go through an outdoorings and naming rite. Among other things, this is a way of welcoming the new person into the society. It also allows the community to rejoice with the parents, especially with the mother, for successfully coming through the difficult task of childbirth. It is a time also to give thanks to the Divine for the gift of the child. The name that is given to the child marks also his or her identity in the society. The rite of outdoorings and naming is held by the society to be a very important rite, accepted and performed by both Christians and non-Christians. However, practices that are seen to be incompatible with the Christian faith, for example, making libation, are not to be performed by the Christians. Since libation prayer forms a very important aspect of the rite, there is conflict in the minds of some of the people.

### *The rite of initiation into womanhood*

As a child grows into adulthood, after the rite of outdoorings and naming, he or she (she in Ewe-dome) is made aware that to be physically or physiologically mature is not enough to make one a responsible adult in the society. She, even though is born as an individual, has been born into a group. There is a concern for the preservation of the group as well as for the person's well-being. There is, therefore, the institution of the rite of initiation into adulthood; a rite that among other things, would give an opportunity for the young woman to receive education in values of the

society. The young woman will also be equipped with reasonable property for her future life. In Aweime Traditional area, for example, provision is also made in the rite to shout out any *gbetsiv* that would prevent the young woman from living a virtuous life. *Gbetsiv* is a spiritual entity that follows a person into life and which can make a person live a life that is not desirable in the community. The whole community, as usual, cares for each of its members and, therefore, participates in the rite. It is after the performance of the rite that a woman is accepted fully as a mature adult in the community.

The rite of initiation into womanhood has very good intentions. The rite, as practised in contemporary life, however, has lost some of its significance. For example, the rite was meant for young women about to enter into womanhood. In contemporary times, some women even with children go through the rite. This is a result of several factors, the greatest of which is economic. Mothers, for economic reasons, are not able to find resources at the right time to perform the rite.

Various opinions that have been expressed by the people about the rite as practised in contemporary life have been discussed. Some of these have been presented verbatim in Chapter 6. Issues that have come out of the rite have also been presented and later examined from theological and ethical perspectives. Some of these have to do with claims that some initiands, in the rite of initiation into womanhood, “catch witchcraft” out of the beads that are presented to them by some of the paternal aunts (*tasis*). There were also questions from some Christians concerning the choice of items that are used in the rite as well as issues concerning the Christian and the state of the dead. Fuller discussions on the issues raised are found in Chapter 7. In this concluding chapter, an attempt is made in making suggestions to the Churches and others in the society.

## **Suggestions to the Churches**

### *On the Rite of Outdooring and Naming*

The rite of outdooring and naming, we have seen, continues to be an important rite to the Ewe-dome. We have already discussed the reasons for this. We

want now to concentrate upon the involvement of the Church in this rite. This is one rite in which the Christian faith and popular culture come together readily. The Church is also, by its teaching, rejoicing with those who rejoice on such a popular occasion. Practices that the Church has found to be either obsolete or offensive to Christian conscience have been stopped. The Church has stopped, for example, the practice of throwing water on the eaves and allowing drops to fall on the child. This practice, we agree with the Church, is obsolete and unhealthy to the child. Throwing water on the eaves and allowing drops to fall on the child could be a traumatic experience for a week old child; the act being performed also at dawn. The frail body is exposed to cold and other forms of infection. The practice can also be psychologically damaging. The child may turn out in future to fear cold water. He or she would, in the future, then not want to go out in the rain to do any work, the very lesson that is, ironically, to be learnt out of the rite. For, childhood psychological experiences go a long way in moulding the kind of person one would be in the future.

We would suggest that the Church gives a second thought to the symbolic holding of pepper and salt close to the mouth of the child, which it has excluded. In the traditional rite, the practice goes with the teaching that the child ought to grow into a person who will appreciate human labour as he or she works for his or her livelihood. Pepper and salt are very important ingredients in almost every meal of an Ewe-dome as they give taste to food. The two ingredients also symbolize hard times (pepper) and good times (salt). The child is, thus, being taught to be prepared to face different situations in life - both difficult and pleasant situations. Such a practice gives a deep understanding of reality, giving also meaning to values that the Ewe-dome hold about life and human existence. Since the practice does not have any adverse effects on the child, nor does it undermine any biblical teaching, one would suggest that the Church can incorporate the practice in its liturgy for the rite. Such an incorporation will have the further merit that it will make the people have a greater sense of the Church's acceptance of a cultural practice that does not undermine the Christian faith. In other words, it will make the people feel that the Christian faith is not an "antagonistic" faith, simply out to destroy every traditional belief and practice, even where the practice does not undermine the Christian faith. Whatever practice

that does not undermine biblical teaching and at the same time contains good values can be accepted by the Church. It is worthy to quote here once more the advice given by Matteo Ricci and the Sacred Congregation for Propagation of the Faith that, no attempt be made “in any way to persuade these people to change their customs, their habits and their behaviour, as long as they are not evidently contrary to religion and morality...”.<sup>306</sup> That will make the African, the Ewe-dome in this case, feel more at home with the Christian faith, an issue we have been concerned with in this thesis. This is the kind of call that the people and African theologians have been making all along, that the Christian message “must be heard and appropriated in the context of every people’s circumstances; the Scriptures must be heard speaking to people in the particularity of their life situations.”<sup>307</sup> That the Church does not need to deny every cultural practice of the people it is evangelizing; it can accommodate practices that do not undermine the Christian faith nor are harmful to those involved in the practices.

The Churches inability to accept the ritual of libation has come out of the conviction that libation prayers that are usually said to the ancestors (and in some cases to the *trɔwo*) are directed to them to act in bringing about certain results. We have discussed the issue fully elsewhere. It seems to me that the Church needs to do more teaching on the Lordship of Christ and adopt also a pragmatic attitude to the ritual. The teaching needs to be intensified, for, the issue of libation is a real issue, of concern to the people. The Church can recall and acknowledge the good lives of the dead, thank God and ask blessings for them. Above all they may ask God to grant the living the grace to emulate the good examples of the dead - emphasis should be only on the good things about them - or to be inspired by their good principles. This can be done during prayers that are usually said at the outdoor ceremonies.

There is an issue also worth the consideration of the Church. That has to do with the first-seven days after the birth of a child. There is, at present, very little involvement of the Church in the life of the child at that age. A child who dies within

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<sup>306</sup> Rule P. K., *Kung-tsu or Confucius: The Jesuit Interpretation of Confucianism*, Sydney, Allen & Unwin, Vol. 2, 1986, p 126, in Ross Andrew, *A Vision Betrayed: The Jesuits in Japan and China (1542-1742)*, p 185.

<sup>307</sup> Dickson Kwesi, *Theology in Africa*, p 20

this period (that is, before the outdooring and naming ceremony) is quietly buried by some members of the family. Needless to say, the quiet burial is tied up with the traditional belief that such a child has not come to stay; else it would have survived the seven days period of seclusion. That child cannot be regarded as “fully human”. In my questioning of some Church leaders on the issue, the general impression that I got was that the one week period before the outdooring and naming ceremony is considered a time for mother and child to recoup after the childbirth. The mother in particular, it was said, needs those days to recover from the physical effects of the birth; while the child also needs the utmost attention for its survival. The navel especially ought to be taken care of with little or no interference from outsiders. It is, therefore, I was told, not as if the child at this time, is not considered by the Church as a human being. The child is still a human being, but one who needs extra care that can better be given inside a room and with little interference from others. It was also said that the pastor or the catechist was free to come round to pray for mother and child, and even take part in the burial of a child who dies within the period of the seven days, if the Church is, in the first place, informed about the birth. The explanations sound quite reasonable.

One suggestion we would still make is that the Churches need to get more involved in the seven days of confinement. The Church needs to teach its members and ask them to report both births and deaths to the elders in the Church. A body can be established to see to this particular issue. By this means, the Church will be able to know the needs of families at this time. The suggestion is based on the fact that some members of the Church did not seem to know that the Church can play such a role in their lives, that is, bury children of members who have died without the outdooring and naming rite. Hence the quiet burial of such children - as if they never existed.

### *Suggestions to the Churches on the rite of initiation into womanhood*

Behind the performance of the rite of initiation into womanhood, as we have found out, there are very good reasons. The rite, in its original sense, was meant to



announce to the community, the stage into which a young woman has entered. That is, the stage of womanhood. The announcement would, thus, qualify the young woman to take up privileges and responsibilities that are normally reserved for adult women. These include marriage. The time of initiation into womanhood was also meant to be a time for the presentation of some basic equipment to the young woman for her future home. It is also a rallying point for the community to make merry with a member who has lived her life up to that stage; a show of solidarity with a member of the group. Since life on earth is believed to be like life in the hereafter, the belief also is that those who have performed the rite and have, therefore, been accepted fully as women in the community, would be accepted as such in the community of women in the hereafter. Those who have not performed the rite and have not, therefore, been accepted fully as women in the community will also not be accepted into the community of women in the hereafter. This is the reason for the performance of the rite on the death bed for those who have not been able to perform it before their death. Thus, through the rite, a young woman is to be groomed and equipped to maintain a certain level of dignity in her new status as a woman.

The rite, as performed in contemporary times, however, has lost some of the reasons for which it was instituted. For instance, in contemporary life, no time is set aside to teach values that are cherished in the society. Schooling and economic factors, among other things, also make it difficult for the rite to be performed at the intended time.

It seems to me that if anything is, at present, worthy of consideration by the Church regarding the rite of initiation into womanhood, then it has to do with the intention of equipping a young woman for her future (marital) home. Other reasons no longer hold in contemporary life or are unacceptable to the Christian conscience, as we have already discussed.

The Church may uphold the reason of equipping a young woman for her future (marital) life as it drops all the other reasons that are associated with the rite. The presentation of the gifts, in this case, may be seen as a mother's effort to supplement the provisions that are expected of the husband-to-be to the wife-to-be. This will enhance the dignifying feeling that the young woman is not walking

“naked” or empty-handed into the marital home. The time for the presentation of the equipment by the mother and others can, however, be planned to coincide with the marriage rite which the Church has accepted. A few, in fact, do it that way. The prescribed cloths are also beautiful cloths that give an identity to the Ewe-dome and which are worn either at home or on ceremonial occasions. Various groups of people are often identified by the way they dress. And as my investigations have shown, there are no traditional spiritual beliefs associated with the items. It seems to me that the Church can allow those items to be used. To simplify things, the festive meal that the mother usually provides for the community can be eliminated. The meal at the marriage rite can cater for both concerns. This suggestion will take care of the heavy expenditure that is involved in the preparation of the meal for the rite of initiation into womanhood. Some, in fact, complained that it is the expenses involved in the communal meal that are “killing”<sup>308</sup> people. It seems to one that that will be a good thing worth the Church’s consideration. Those who are already settled in marital homes or are already settled in “single homes”, old in age, need not go through the rite.

In this case the Church needs to get more involved in the education of the youth in the society. Efforts have to be made to educate the youth (both men and women) in the values that are cherished in the society. Some of the Churches are, in fact, holding counselling sessions for the youth in the Church, among other things. This is very good and should be encouraged in other Churches. Values that are cherished in the society, which are not very different from biblical teachings, could be taught the youth during the sessions. My emphasis here is on “both males and females”. Inculcating the values that are cherished in the society must not be limited to females only, as is the case in the traditional system of the rite. One, we said, is not trying to sound “feminist” in this work - even though one does not worry about the use of the term if it is used in an egalitarian sense of giving equal rights and opportunities for everybody irrespective of sex. Our concern is to find solutions to a problem that affects all in the society, irrespective of sex. It is important to educate

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<sup>308</sup> Many of the women in all the areas made such a complaint, including even those who would want a continuation of the rite. I discussed this very complaint with the chief of Aveme-Beme, Fia Brempong II, among other things, during my visit to him, 12th April, 1997 (No. 21 under Bibliography).

young men on sexual morality, for example, we said earlier, just as it is important to educate young women on it. To educate females only to be chaste till they are married, without giving correspondent education to their male counterparts is to give an incomplete solution to a problem that is to be solved.

The Church as an agent of education and transformation has to play an active role to teach values that are urged by the custodians of traditional rites and which are at the same time of concern to the Church. Thus it would be contributing to the realization of successful lives that include fertility, a gift of *Mawu*.

Alongside the above suggestion, we would add that the Church needs to intensify its family-life programmes to parents. This is because the training that a child gets from parents in the home, goes a long way in moulding the future life of that child. It is evident that to set few days or even months aside for giving training to a young one who is about to enter into adulthood as it used to be the case in the traditional set up could not produce as much of the desired results as the daily training that a child would have at home. The time that is spent in listening to, and watching the exemplary lives of parents at home, goes a long way in shaping the future life of a child. Indeed, the counsel in the Book of Proverbs to train children the way they should go and when they grow up, they will not depart from it is true (Prov. 22:6). The home is the foundation and many morals and other virtues like hard work, respect for people (not only for the elderly), fidelity to partners (in marriage and in business), and so on, can all be taught in the home even before and after the child has entered into adulthood. Other efforts in the society are complementary only to what is learnt at home. The Churches, therefore, need to intensify their sessions on family-life education programmes, not only for the youth, but also for married couples, parents and others in the society. In other words, it needs to be an on-going process.

The Churches can also get involved in discussing with the custodians of the traditional practices as well as others who are involved, the items that are to be presented to the young woman; to make sure that what is expected is reasonable, that is, suits the economic conditions of the time. Efforts have to be made by the Church to explain things to all those involved about the aspects of the rite that have lost their significance, and those that are unacceptable to the Church's faith. Many of the

custodians of customary practices are at the same time Christians. It is only when things are clear in the mind of all the parties that are involved that things will work out well for all. One may add at this point that the Christian faith is not just a belief, it is also a way of life, a living faith that can transform cultures. It can, however, transform only what it understands. For this reason, we would urge the Church to always do a careful study of the cultural practices, and not leave people in suspense for too long periods of time, find out what can be integrated with Christian beliefs and practices and what cannot. To stand in the pulpit and condemn all practices as paganistic or to accept every practice in its entirety seeing it as cultural, will not be helpful to the Church. The idea that everything cultural should be rejected is also ahistorical to the Christian faith, for, the Christian faith, with its praxis, is a dynamic faith - even though the Gospel is unchangeable. Some, in fact, in the history of the Church, are practices that have been taken over from "paganistic cultures" and given new interpretations that would be meaningful to the Christian faith. Some people do not seem to know this while others know but ignore it. For example, Christmas, the day set for the celebration of the birth of Christ, is said to be "chosen only by the Roman Churches late in the fourth century, to coincide with a day that used to be the 'birthday of the Sun', a pagan solstice festival".<sup>309</sup> The "pagan day" was chosen by the Church and given a new interpretation, and this day is still celebrated today as the birth day of Christ by all Churches - including the Church in Ewe-dome. How true it is to say that "There can never be a culturally naked Christianity".<sup>310</sup> In other words, the Gospel comes to meet cultures already in existence and these cultures need not be condemned in their entirety, they only have to be transformed by the Gospel. Part of the transformation process is the examining, and, where possible, choosing of some practices in the culture and giving them new interpretations, by the standards of the Gospel. This can, however, be done only, when the Church, in the first place understands the philosophy or reasons behind the practices. The pulpit can then be used to expound to the people, things that are no longer relevant in contemporary life, or which are unacceptable to the faith, but which are still of concern to the people. It

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<sup>309</sup> Neufeld, Don (ed.), *Seven Day Adventist Encyclopaedia*, Review and Herald Pub. Association, p 284

is by so doing that the faith can be brought down to the people, to use the words of Dickson once more, “in the particularity of their life situations”.<sup>311</sup> To be able to do that effectively, the Churches have to be very conversant with the traditional practices and their essence or significance. The sifting may be difficult but not an impossibility.

*An Issue On the Rite of Initiation into Womanhood and the Rite of Confirmation*

If the suggestions above are accepted by the Church, we shall then consider the rite of initiation into womanhood and Confirmation. It has been asked whether this rite of initiation into womanhood, to be known now as the rite of presentation, and the rite of Confirmation cannot be blended at the time of Confirmation. Confirmation is a rite that is celebrated by some Churches, including the E. P. Churches in Ghana, as:

a holy institution of the Church, through which those who receive baptism in infancy are confirmed into the Christian faith, preparing them for the Lord's Supper. Candidates for Confirmation must attain the age of 14 years or more. A meeting of Presbyters and Church mothers shall concern itself with children who are eligible for the lessons of faith and those that shall have been deferred. They shall attend the requisite lessons to qualify them for the Confirmation. Periods for the classes shall agree with the level of understanding of the candidates<sup>312</sup>.

The rite of Confirmation is meant for those who have first gone through “infant baptism”, at which time their parents and god parents would have taken vows to the effect that they would bring up the children in the Christian faith. At the time of Confirmation, such persons, publicly, then ratify the vows and promises that were made on their behalf during the infant baptism. The confirmands go through a period of instruction, based on biblical teachings: for instance, the Ten Commandments, the Apostles Creed, and some teachings about the Christian faith. A day is then fixed on which they present themselves to the congregation, for their stand in the faith to be

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<sup>310</sup> Omoyajowo Akin, “The Church's Prophetic Witness in the Politico-cultural contexts of Nigeria”, in *Africa Theological Journal*, Volume 2, No. 1, 1982

<sup>311</sup> Dickson Kwesi, *Theology in Africa*, p 20

<sup>312</sup> Articles 1 & 2 under “Confirmation” in The Constitution of the Evangelical Presbyterian Church, p 43

confirmed. So that it is after the rite of Confirmation that people become full members of the Church, can attend the Lord's Supper and take up various roles of responsibility in the Church.

Those who advocate the blending of the rite of initiation into womanhood (or presentation) with that of the Confirmation do so on the basis that there is a point of contact between the traditional initiation rite and the Church's rite of Confirmation. For example, in the traditional initiation rite, the initiands are seen as being on the verge of adulthood within the society. In a similar way, Confirmation classes are usually held for those baptized and who are seeking full membership of the Church. Secondly, the one being initiated in the traditional set up is to be taught the values as cherished in the society. In a similar way, confirmands are taught the doctrines and values of the Church, values that are not very different from those that are cherished in the society (aside those that have to do with the faith about Christ). Furthermore, those who go through the traditional rite of initiation are accepted as full adult members of the community. The rite gives them full rights, privileges and responsibilities. They can attend adult meetings, marry, be expected to make and receive donations, among other things. In the same way, the rite of Confirmation qualifies one as a full member of the Church with responsibilities and privileges. For example, one can attend the Lord's Supper - as one now understands the full implication of that rite - and can be a leader in the Church.

Thus, both the traditional rite of initiation into adulthood (womanhood in this case) and that of Confirmation are meant for the young adults, marking a transition into full membership.

The arguments, as above, sound good. The rite of Confirmation, even though essentially a religious act, is at the same time, of social significance as it marks maturity not only in religious matters, but also maturity within the society's context of what it means to be mature. The age of "14 years or above", a time considered reasonable for a person to be confirmed, is at the same time, the time when averagely, young persons with physiological changes are entering into adulthood. That is the time that the society also, ideally, would initiate young ones into adulthood.



Again, many of the values that are taught the young adult at the point of Confirmation are also values that are cherished in the society. For example, the young ones, at the time of Confirmation, are taught lessons on purity or keeping chaste till they are married, a value that is cherished also in the traditional set up. The two rites, therefore, have the basic purpose of giving recognition to the maturity of the young ones socially, psychologically or emotionally, and religiously.

The suggestion one would like to make here is that, the Church, as we said earlier, can drop the traditional religious significance of the rite of initiation into womanhood as it accepts other essentials of the rite. That is, it may see the rite as essentially a way of a mother supplementing whatever the husband-to-be will be presenting to her daughter for their future life together. One would still, however, hold that the rite of presenting the items to the young woman can be performed at the point where the young woman is to be married (at the marriage rite) rather than at the time of Confirmation. The following are reasons for making the suggestion: At the time of Confirmation (around 14 years), the girl is still too young for marriage or for her to live an independent life outside the home of the parents. To present items to her for a future (marital) life at that age will, therefore, not be as meaningful as when the items are presented to her at the point of her marriage. There may also be the problem of the presentation serving as a proclamation (license) that the girl is now a woman and can, therefore, engage in activities of the adult women. This could include sexual activities. Yet, the girl, at that age of 14 years is still at school and unprepared for marriage. So that there will be a problem of what would ensure that the girl will remain chaste until she is married. Furthermore, the merry-making for the woman will then be shared also by the man at this time of marriage. Men need to be rejoiced with in the same way that women are rejoiced with and this will be most appropriate at the point of marriage. To set a different time to rejoice with women only, is to discriminate against men, who in any case, are also entering adulthood with future homes.

Secondly, the mother (or the young woman) might not be ready with the items at the time of Confirmation. The practical situation these days is that it is the young woman who works to help the mother with the resources that are needed for such a

presentation - even though ideally, it is the mother who is to do the presentation. At the time of marriage, the young woman and mother (and others) would have been better prepared for the ceremony.

Furthermore, a person going through the time of Confirmation need not be saddled with other specifications or financial problems of providing for a future life. The presentation of items to young women for a future life may be done more meaningfully at the point of marriage than at the point of Confirmation.

### **Suggestions to others**

Some of the suggestions that have been made to the Churches are applicable to the traditional religious believer and others also.

#### *On the rite of Outdooring and Naming*

The rite of Outdooring and Naming, we have found out, has been accepted by all in the society. Practices that are obsolete or harmful to the child ought not be performed, while those that are valuable or meaningful and are not harmful, can be continued. Throwing of water on the eaves for some to fall on to the child, for example, good though the reason behind it is, that is, to introduce the child to the physical conditions that he or she will meet in life, can be physically and psychologically damaging to a child at that tender age of 8 days. It is good, therefore, that some have stopped the practice. On the other hand, the symbolic holding of pepper and salt close to the mouth of the child is full of meaning as it is used to counsel him or her to grow into an industrious person who will work for his or her own living and be able to face life with its complexities. The practice brings in a lot of symbolism, meaningful to life, and is also not harmful to the child.

The issues on libation and the use of alcoholic drinks have also been carefully examined. The traditional religious believers in Ewe-dome, it is generally known, are quite tolerant and give respect to the beliefs and practices of other religious believers - depending on the attitude of such believers also towards them. The traditional religious believer would, therefore, not impose the making of libation on members of

their kin group who are Christians and who would not perform the ritual. On the other hand, some Christians, by the nature of their beliefs, are “intolerant” of the traditional beliefs and practices being performed, sometimes even by those who do not belong to their faith. The fact is that, such Christians, by their faith of dependence on God alone through Christ, find it difficult to stand and watch prayers that are being made to supernatural beings, other than God. This is based especially on the Christian scriptural teaching that : “You shall have no other gods besides (before) me” (cf. Exod. 20:3). Libation, even if it is made to the ancestors, (that is where names of *trɔwo* are not mentioned), is still seen by such Christians as undermining the sufficiency of God alone in giving blessings to human beings. At the same time such Christians find it difficult not to attend the ceremonies of their kinsmen or women or people with whom they share blood or other forms of relations. The whole phenomenon seems to be a dilemma for such Christians. Some of the Christians, on the other hand, we noted, do not seem to care about the ritual of libation being performed even at their own ceremonies. It needs tolerance and mutual respect from all sides.

#### *On the rite of initiation into adulthood*

The rite of initiation into womanhood, we have said, has good reasons for it. It is good, for example, to teach values of the society to a young woman. It is good also to equip a young woman with reasonable property and equipment for her future home. However, the rite as practised in contemporary times, has lost some of the good reasons for which it was instituted. For example, to make women who are already settled in marital homes, sometimes with children, to go through a rite with the intention of equipping them for marital homes or advertising their maturity for marriage, is like closing the pen when the sheep or goat has already escaped.

The suggestion is that every effort needs to be made, if the dignity of the rite is to be saved, to perform the rite at the right time and that is, at the point that a young woman is about to enter the marital home. Gifts that will be received by the young woman will then serve as supplements to those that are expected from the

husband-to-be. In such a case, the mother of the young woman will still feel happy that the daughter is not entering the marriage “naked” or with empty hands.

The above suggestion goes with another that the custodians of the tradition will need to retrace their steps of finding time, not only at the point of marriage, but also during other opportune times like other festive occasions for which people come round to celebrate, to do the teaching on the values that are cherished in the society. This suggestion ought to be given the most serious consideration by the custodians of the society’s values. The teachings could be directed to both young women and men, for, an ideal society can be made up not only of respectable, hardworking and hospitable women, but also of men with the same qualities of life.

The issue of teenage pregnancy, for example, which the society decries so much, is the making of both young women and men. One has observed that while society tends to put the blame of sexual laxity, among other things, on the Churches’ disuse or discontinuation of traditional practices that include initiation into womanhood, the custodians of tradition have also not accepted the fact that things have changed. The custodians of tradition are no longer able to perform their duty of educating the young ones as it used to be the case. This is due not only to the Churches’ attitudes to traditional practices, it is due also to other factors such as schooling, money economy, urbanization, among other things, as we discussed elsewhere in the work. Much time is spent at school and on jobs, sometimes outside the traditional environment. The young ones are, therefore, not able to find time - as it used to be the case in the past - to stay with the custodians for the necessary education.

Again, parents and others in the community, in particular those who are illiterates, seem to regard those attending school to be so knowledgeable that they become “untouchable”. Such parents, therefore, feel shy of teaching what they think may be considered as “old fashioned”. Indeed, various forms of outside influence are also affecting the outlook to life in contemporary society. For example, there are some who think the youth should be provided with contraceptive devices rather than teach them lessons on the avoidance of pre-marital sex. To continue “preaching” on avoidance of pre-marital sex, therefore, is to be seen as old-fashioned. So that apart

from the Christian faith which sometimes decries customary practices, many other factors are at work in the changes that we now experience in contemporary life. This is, however, not to say that hands should, therefore, be thrown into the air. It needs a concerted effort of all, to instil the good values of the society into the youth.

The rite as we said, may then be combined with the marriage rite. Any time that may be set either before or after the marriage rite, we have observed, will not be good enough for its performance.

The above suggestion will also cut down on the expenses that are usually spent on the preparation of the communal meal for the rite of initiation into womanhood. Whatever meal that is usually prepared at the marriage rite would suffice for the presentation of the gifts to the young woman.

Furthermore, the limitation that is put on items that are to be presented to the young woman is meant to prevent the rich from showing off with too much equipment while the poor also struggle to match the rich. However, more can still be done to revise the items at regular intervals to suit the economic changes in contemporary life. Nothing should prevent the elderly custodians of tradition from seeking the views of the young women and their mothers - in fact all others in the society - whenever decisions are to be made on the basic items that should be expected from a mother. We have urged in this writing that the community always needs at all times to strike a balance between what it regards as its rights and the rights of individuals in the society. It will, therefore, be good if all work together to reach a consensus on what should be provided, taking into consideration, the economic situation in contemporary times.

Concerning the rite being seen as a prerequisite for one's acceptance into the community of women in the hereafter, our view is that those who belong to the traditional religious set up may perform the rite according to their beliefs. And those who are Christians need not entertain beliefs that they have found to be incompatible with their faith. The performance of the rite on the death bed for those who do not perform it before their death ought not be a problem for those who do not hold the belief that is associated with the practice. For, freedom to hold a particular religious faith is a fundamental right that ought not be violated. It can be a violation of one's

right at the highest level if it is performed for a person who all along stood against it. One ought not die with a bad conscience, and moreso when one has no opportunity to try to reverse it. This issue of the freedom in matters of faith and conscience can be carried into other areas of traditional practices, perhaps not only in Ewe-dome, but elsewhere, to respect the religious convictions of people, so that rites are not performed for people at death, when all along they have stood against them in their life time.

To conclude, I will make a final observation that there is the need for all in the area, in particular the Churches, to which many in the area belong, to sort out the essentials of the rites of birth and initiation into adulthood. They may then find out their usefulness in contemporary society, and so work things out that customs and practices will not undermine the faith of those who are involved in the practices.

To the Churches in particular, we will say that the guidelines of 1876, even though they were meant for the missionaries working on the field at the time, are still relevant today even for them (as contemporary missionaries). It is pertinent to remind ourselves of one of the clauses of the guidelines which we quoted earlier:

an inconsiderate damning or dismissal of heathenism is no way to win the trust of the heathen and to convince them of the truth of Christianity, but it will rather raise a spirit of stubbornness and obstinacy in holding on to the traditional beliefs, and will shut their hearts to the missionary. Much more useful will it be to find, in the faith and heart of the heathen, points of contact for Christian truth, and from there begin the work of conviction.<sup>313</sup>

The above guideline is still quite pertinent to the Church even today. One may not like the use of the word “heathen” as found in the quotation - for, the traditional religious believers are not heathens; they have a religion. Yet there are significant differences as well as important similarities between indigenous Ewe-dome religion and Christianity. For peaceful co-existence, it is desirable to do a careful study and, where possible, find out “points of contact for Christian truth”. The early missionaries had the guidelines but it seems they were, somehow, found wanting in the application of the guidelines on the field. Aside from their own human weaknesses, one may say, the missionaries must have faced genuine problems for

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<sup>313</sup> Grau E., “Missionary Policies As seen in the work of Missions with the Evangelical Presbyterian Church, Ghana”, in Baeta C. G., (ed.), *Christianity in Tropical Africa*, p 66.



which reason they could not sift what might be seen as incompatible to the Christian faith from what might be seen as merely “cultural”; nor were they able to find out “the points of contact”. The whole process of trying to do the sifting needs time and patience, yet the hard unfavourable weather and mosquitoes had terrible effects on them and perhaps, for this reason they could not have the needed time or patience to do the critical analysis. Some of the practices that have been found to be wrong, for example, some of the punishments that were meted out to those “caught” as witches were also such that the missionaries decided to make new converts abandon all beliefs and practices that are associated with the phenomenon of witchcraft. Perhaps they could have at least, in theory, given recognition to the existence of the phenomenon, that is, even if they themselves did not believe in the existence of the phenomenon on the bases of their scientific presuppositions. So that some of the missionaries, one may say, must have got some genuine problems for which reason they could not genuinely relate the Christian faith to the traditional culture. [This is not the same as holding brief for those who might have come down with a sense of European superiority in everything they did and for which they did not find out the good in things African].

The new missionaries (the Churches in the area) ought to learn from the mistakes of their predecessors (the early missionaries) and do a more critical, open-minded, and objective evaluation of traditional practices. Indeed, the early missionaries had come and are gone but the rites are still with the people. There is also, indeed, as we said earlier, no record of the early missionaries asking of the people in the area to abandon the rites that we have been concerned with, as it was the case among another group of people in the country. The new missionaries (the Churches), therefore, when faced with such situations, the kinds of which we are dealing with need to reflect on the basis of the practices, as well as do an ethical evaluation of them to find out those that are of good value and those that do not unduly undermine a person’s rights, and which are at the same time compatible with the faith. The essentials can be accommodated to the Churches’ beliefs and practices while the others are eliminated. That is a way by which the Gospel can serve as a transformer of a people’s culture instead of its serving as the means of uprooting the

cultural practices in their entirety. By so doing, we hope that the individual will be able to balance his or her role as a Christian and as a member of his or her traditional society.

To all others, we again say there is need for also a sober reflection on the rites and a giving up of various aspects that have become meaningless and not useful to those involved. There is also the need always to balance the rights of the individuals and those of the community.



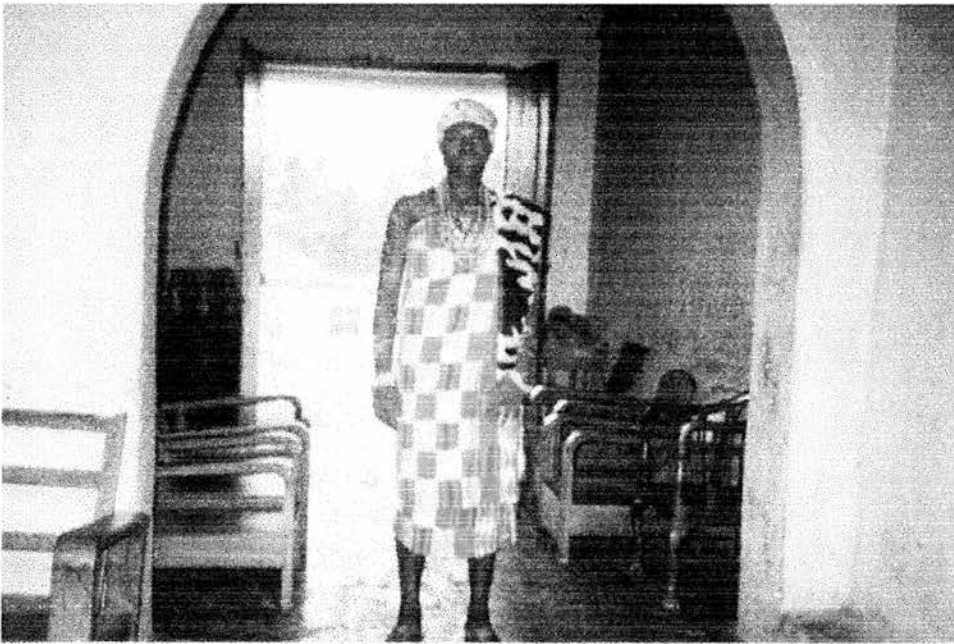
Songs are sung to hoot out any *gbetsi* that may come into the life of the initiand - Aveme



The *tasi* comes round and touches the mouth of the initiand with a morsel of one of the eggs to wish her every good thing in life - Aveme



The initiand distributes some of the food among boys and girls who are present - Aveme



She is then dressed in a beautiful kente cloth with beads to match; and marks made from ochre on her body - Aveme



Initiands dressed in their *tadedzi* attire ready to receive congratulations from members of the community.



Women in the community help in the preparation of the communal meal - Avatime





Women singing and clapping in solidarity with the initiand - Kpandu



Fetching water is a household chore that is performed by the initiand - Kpandu





Dressed in their Ewedo cloths and necklaces to match the initiands are walked through the town to give thanks - Avatime



Water containing a local herb is poured on the legs of the initiands - Avatime

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## Interviewees/Respondents

1. Abada Theodius Afetɔ, Kpandu-Dzoanti.
2. Abaye Monica Afenɔ, P. O. Box Am. 4, Amedzɔfe-Avetime.

3. Abofua Paulina Okusidze V111, Queenmother, Avatime traditional area, P. O. Box 10, Vane.
4. Adraku Evelyn AfenƆ, P. O. Box Am.50, AmedzƆfe-Avatime.
5. Adzah A. AfenƆ, E. P. Church of Ghana, Kpandu-Dzoanti.
6. AfƆmale Prosper, Catechist, E. P. Church, Ghana, Aveme-Beme.
7. Afedo Rosina Mama, Dzogbefeme-Avatime.
8. Agbeka Rosemary AfenƆ, c/o Mr. Richard Dzitri, P. O. Box 8, Kpandu.
9. Agyemang G. AfenƆ, E. P. Church of Ghana, Kpandu-Dzoanti.
10. Akoto A. AfenƆ, E. P. Church of Ghana, AmedzƆfe-Avatime.
11. Akoto Benoni, Pastor, E. P. Church of Ghana, AmedzƆfe-Avatime.
12. AmedzƆku KƆsi *Tsiami* (chief's spokesman), Tsido-Awudome.
13. Ameh A. AfenƆ, E. P. Church of Ghana, AmedzƆfe-Avatime.
14. Amoah George, Pastor, E. P. Church, Ghana, Peki.
15. Ansre Gilbert, Rev. Prof., E. P. Church, Ghana, Medina, Accra.
16. Ashighey W., Pastor, E. P. Church of Ghana, Goviefe.
17. Atakro Mcwilson, Pastor, E. P. Church, Ghana, P. O. Box 18, Ho.
18. Bakudie Theodora Mama, Vane-Avatime.
19. Besse-Dzubey Kwamekuma AfetƆ, traditional religious believer, Kpandu-Dzoanti.
20. Boni Mansah, Nyangbo
21. Brempong 11 Kwasi, *Fia*, chief of Aveme-Beme.
22. Chiesu Bedu Yanene AfenƆ, Nyangbo-Emli.
23. Deh Adzewoda AfetƆ, traditional religious believer, Kpandu-Dzoanti.
24. Deh Comfort MianƆ, Queen-mother of Kpandu-Dzoanti.
25. Dzade-Ahiaglo AfetƆ, P. O. Box 643, Ho.
26. Dzobo Noah, Rev. Prof., E. P. Church, Ghana, P. O. Box 18, Ho.
27. Gakpe-Ntsri Theodore, Rev. Father, St. Peters Seminary, Cape Coast.
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30. Gbekor C. W., Pastor, E. P. Church of Ghana, Accra.
31. Kumatse Comfort AfenƆ, P. O. Box 4, Amedzɔfe-Avetime.
32. Kumatse John AfetƆ, P. O. Box 4, Amedzɔfe-Avetime.
33. Kumatse Yawkpo AfetƆ, Amedzɔfe.
34. Lassey Agnes AfenƆ, E. P. Church, Ghana, Kpandu-Dzoanti.
35. Ledo J. Y. Rt. Rev., moderator, E. P. Church Headquarters, P. O. Box 18, Ho.
36. Mabre Dina AfenƆ, E. P. Church, Ghana, Kpandu.
37. Mawusi Yadedu, Nyangbo
38. Opoku-Abimah Gustav AfetƆ, E. P. Church, Ghana, Aveme-Beme.
39. Otiaku V. E., Rt. Rev., Synod Clerk, E. P. Church of Ghana Headquarters, Accra.
40. Tosa Comfort AfenƆ, Nyangbo-Emli.
41. Tosa Felicia AfenƆ, Nyangbo-Emli.
42. Tosa Kofi AfetƆ, a traditional religious believer, Nyangbo-Emli.
43. Tretsu Monica AfenƆ, c/o AfetƆ E. K. Datse, P. O. Box Am. 4, Amedzɔfe-Avetime.
44. Tretsu Simon AfetƆ, P. O. Box Am.36, Amedzɔfe-Avetime.
45. Wagba AfetƆ, traditional religious believer, Vane-Avetime.

#### **A group of Women interviewed at Aveme-Beme**

46. Agrobasa Beatrice AfenƆ
47. Akpambo Gladys AfenƆ
48. Asayia Sophia AfenƆ
49. Bani Mercy AfenƆ Charlotte
50. Bediako Lydia AfenƆ
51. Bempong Stella AfenƆ
52. Dododza Josephine AfenƆ
53. Dododza Lena AfenƆ

54. Dododza Olivia Afen▷
55. Dompeh Charlotte Afen▷
56. Dumehasi Rosina Afen▷
57. Ego Catherine Afen▷
58. Ego Renatu Afen▷
59. Ego Selina Afen▷
60. Folivi-Abima Comfort Afen▷
61. Gb▷ku Vivian Afen▷
62. Koka Esther Afen▷
63. Matey Victoria Afen▷
64. Opoku Rose Afen▷
65. Wiafamia Gyenkyema Afen▷

## Appendix

### Questions' Guide

#### Questions on Cosmogony

##### 1. What are your views about the world?

- a) Who do you think created the world (or how did, in your opinion, the world come into existence)?
- b) Who control(s) affairs of the world?
- c) How did *trɔwo* come into existence?
- d) Are prayers made to the *trɔwo* or to the ancestors meant for them to act, or are they to be carried over to the creator of the world?

#### Questions on Concepts of A Person

- a). What is a human person made of? Terms to be explained carefully.
- b). What is the relationship between a human person and the spirit world?
- c). What other things do you think affect a human person?

#### Questions About The Dead

- a). Where do the dead go?
- b). What life do the dead live?
- c). What is the relationship between the dead and the living?
- d). Do the dead influence the lives of the living?

#### Questions on Rite of Birth

- a). What rituals are performed as birth rite?
- b). Do you see the rite of outdooring and naming an important rite?
- c). Should the rite be continued, modified or abolished?



d). If you are a Christian, would you recommend to the Church certain aspects of the rite that are not being performed by the Church?

#### Questions on Initiation into Womanhood?

a). What are the reasons for the performance of the rite of initiation into womanhood?

b). What moral values are taught?

c). Has there been any change(s) or modifications to the traditional rite?

d). What has brought about the changes, if any?

e). In your opinion, do you think the rite should be: modified, continued the way it is, or abolished?

f). Do you think the Christian faith is undermining the traditional rite of initiation into womanhood?

e). Do you think the rite undermines an individual's convictions?

#### A Sample of Responses

1). Synod Clerk, E. P. Church of Ghana, Rt. Rev. Otiaku, E. P. Church of Ghana Headquarters, Accra, 14th April, 1997.

Qt: I am, please, here to make some findings about the rite of initiation into womanhood, a rite that seems to have become a problem to some members of the Church in these days. I have chosen some areas in Ewe-dome as my areas of research.

Ans: Oh yes, you are welcome and sorry for the little delay in calling you in. By the way, does your area of research include my area (Akpafu/ Lolobi)? The research is of importance to us also.

Qt: Sorry, my areas of research exclude your area, [ *I called to him the areas I am studying*] but I think issues that would be discussed among the chosen areas would, to a large extent, be of the same concern to those of your area also. And in any case,

the rite in these areas are of concern to your Church, I think. I have already gone round some of the villages and towns and have observed the processes that are involved in the performances. Reasons for the rite have also been given. They include one that the young woman ought to be made into “a woman”, for her to be accepted into the community of women, both in this life and the hereafter. She is also being rejoiced with, equipping her for her future (marital) life. What do you think are problems that are found in the rite for which the Christian women in these days would prefer not to perform the rite?

Ans: Yes, in my area, the rite in these days is even referred to as “*Ayefru*” [literally meaning a woman who is being married] and they go through various processes.

Qt: That is interesting; the woman is not being married and yet the rite is being referred to as “*Ayefru*”?

Ans: Yes. (*a little laughter*) All right, I will say that my Church has not taken a conclusive, official position on the rite as at present. I think we need to examine issues carefully, based on Christian principles. What Christian principles can be used in bringing about a resolution of conflict that the people are going through? The rite seems to be so important to the people and yet there are obvious difficulties that have to be sorted out. We will need to examine the rite based on Christian principle. What is the Christian concept of the after-life, for example?..... I will suggest you contact pastor Benoni Akoto, working in one of your chosen areas, to find out how best he is handling the situation in the area. Pastor Akoto will be in a good position to discuss the issues involved as experienced in the area (*Amedzɔfe*). By the way, our Church is also organizing a seminar for women around this time, at a place not far from this Headquarters. I think it will be good to visit them to see the sort of teachings that go on there, for the women.

Qt: Thank you very much. I will try to be there, if time would allow me. And I will certainly see pastor Akoto also, as you suggested.

2). A woman, Age: 42 years; E. P. Church, Ghana (name withheld), 31st March, 1997; Vane. Has just finished going through the rite of initiation into womanhood.

Q: You have just finished performing the rite of initiation into womanhood. How do you feel about it.

Ans: I feel greatly relieved now.

Qt: What is the great relief about?

Ans: I now feel I am also a woman. It could be an anxious moment for a woman who, even though old in age, is not able to perform the rite. You always think people are talking about you; you are not able to dress properly since you would have to be saving cloths for the rite; and it will be performed for you even while you are laid in state.

Qt: What is the reason for the performance of the rite on the death bed for those who are not able to perform it before their death?

Ans: Well, they say one would not be accepted into the community of women in the life after death - so they say - and that will not augur well, not only for the individual who is dead, but for the society as a whole, since the person would be haunting the living for her settlement.

Qt: As a Christian, do you think you would experience such occurrences after your death, if you had not performed the rite?

Ans: Well, I don't know. But the rite is also a custom and one is, therefore, not at peace if one did not perform it. People will be talking about you.

Qt: Were you taught any moral lessons or values as part of the processes in the performance of the rite?

Ans: No. I heard the teaching used to be the case in the past. But now, that is not being done. In the past, I learnt girls had to be chaste before the performance of the rite. But look at me, I have two children already - before the performance of the rite.

Qt: So then, do you think the rite has lost its significance?

Ans: To some extent, yes; but it is still good since all that I have acquired out of it is for my own use. And the joy that was shared with me by the whole community makes me feel good. The rite is also part of our custom.

3). Female; Age: 36 years, E. P. Church of Ghana, Ho, 28th May, 1997; On the rite of Birth.

Qt: May you please tell me of the processes that you went through as the outdoorings and naming rite, with your new-born baby girl.

Ans:[The processes were narrated. The pastor of the Church went through the procedures].

Qt: Are you satisfied with the ritual process?

Ans: Oh yes.

Qt: Do you see the rite of outdoorings and naming an important one?

Ans: Oh yes. It is an important one. You know, or at least you've heard, of what it means to go through child birth. [*I know, I said*]. It is a matter of struggling with death. I think it is good to rejoice with the mother especially and thank God for the deliverance.

Qt: Are there certain aspects of the rite that are performed in the traditional rite that you wish could be incorporated into the Church's way of performance?

Ans: Well, some people make use of Schnapps in the outdoorings and naming ceremony. We (our Church) do not make use of alcoholic drinks. Well, those who may want to have a taste of alcoholic drinks may do so, but as I said, our Church does not allow the use of alcoholic drinks and personally, I don't like alcohol.

Qt: What about the ritual of libation?

Ans: No, not at all. We don't have to make libation to invite the *trɔwo* and the ancestral spirits. Some of these dead people were witches and how will you know who is coming? If you invite a dead person whom, you may not know, was a witch, then you are creating problems for the child. He/she will be worried by the witch throughout his/her life-time. Let the dead take their rest and the living perform the rite for themselves.

4).An elderly man, 78 years, Christian, Ho district, 3rd February, 1997.

Q: Tɔgbe, the rite of outdooring and naming seems to be an important one in Ewe-dome. What are your views about it?

Ans: Oh yes, that is an important rite. I am a man, but I still know of how important it is to make merry with a woman who has come out of childbirth. It is very important to perform it.

Q: What processes are gone through?

Ans: [He narrated the processes (the traditional ones)].

Qt: But the Church does not allow the ritual of libation. What do you think about that, and as a Christian?

Ans: That is why we don't mind them. We allow them to finish with their version, and we also do our own thing. Why should we treat the ancestors with contempt? Are they not part of the clan?

Qt: What is said in the libation prayer?

Ans: [At this point, a brother of the old man, who had joined us and showed a keen interest in the conversation, asked that we should buy some drink and perform the ritual of libation, for me to listen. But the old man said] 'It's all right. You are an Ewe, aren't you?

Qt: Yes, I am. O. K. But there is this other issue of a non-use of alcoholic drink in the performance of the rite. And the use of the Schnapps?

Ans.: [*From the brother* - It is the new Churches in particular that are squeamish over such things. They speak in languages we don't understand; and would always ask if you have accepted Jesus. These days they don't even mention the name of God at all. They only speak of Jesus, Jesus.